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POETRY AND
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# PIERS PLOWMAN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
ARTHUR BURRELL, M.A.

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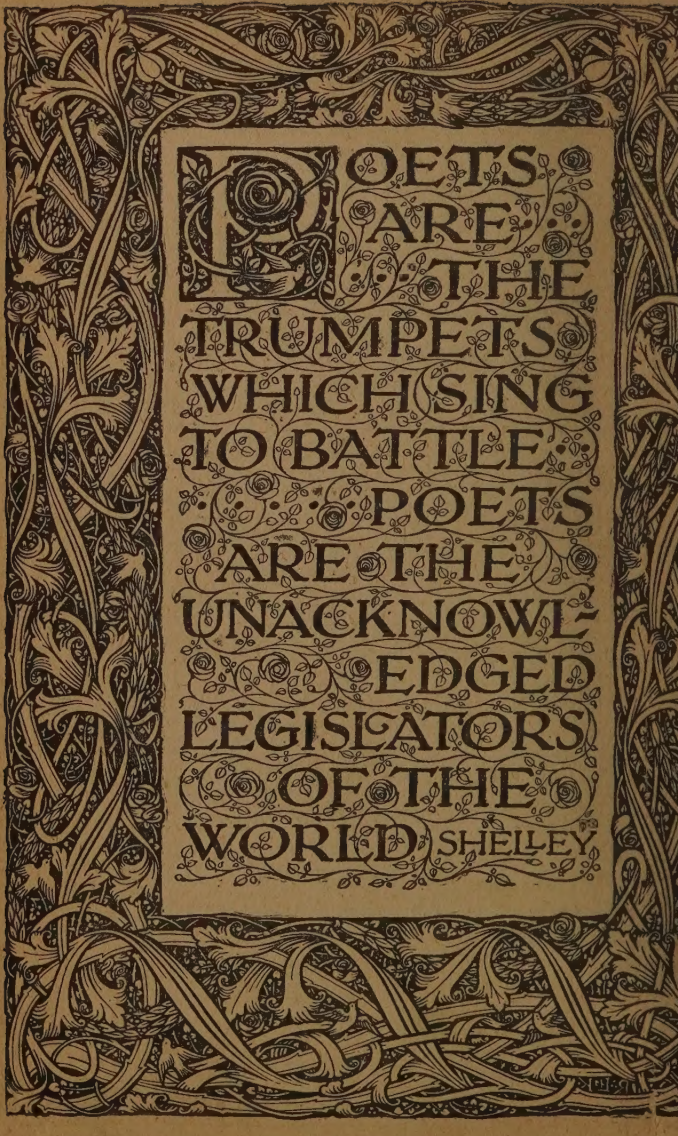
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# PIERS PLOWMAN

*The Vision of a Peoples Christ by William Langland. A Version for the Modern Reader.*

BY ARTHUR BURRELL M.A.

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# INTRODUCTION

In bringing before the reader a version of this amazing book, I wish, as in the case of my edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, to disarm, if I can, the criticism of the scholar. My version is not intended in any sense for those who can read with ease the alliterative poems of the fourteenth or earlier centuries. Knowing, however, that it requires very careful study to read *Piers Plowman* with ease and pleasure, I have occasionally omitted and always simplified. I have tried to preserve and bring out the meaning, the careless alliteration, and the elusive rhythm. I have regularly modernised the spelling, and have indeed followed the example set by the most learned editor of the poem, who has himself published a modernised text: indeed there are several of such texts in the market. This, as in the case of the Chaucer, is the whole of my offence. The specialist will find echoes from M. Jusserand and Professor Skeat everywhere.

*Piers Plowman* is regarded as the poor mans book. But, though I hope the spirit is preserved, I have resolutely avoided by any phrase reading into it a special message for to-day. A comment with notes inwoven has indeed called attention to singular survivals, parallels in social life, but these parallels would, even without the reference to them, force themselves upon the attention of any one.

Much has been made about the confusion in the poem; but the main scheme is perfectly clear. Under the favourite form of a vision, it is a picture and an arraignment of the England of Edward III. and Richard II. As the first Isaiah, said to have been a young aristocrat, listened to the call in the Temple, and left a life of ease to act for thirty years as the unsparing critic of the Jerusalem and Judah of his day, so *per contra* our author, a man of humble extraction, it would seem, and of no social pretension, hurled his invective, his satire, and his grim fun at the London and the England of Chaucers time. He is an Old



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Testament prophet with English humour added to Hebrew seriousness. We are, whatever we think of the question of authorship, in the presence of one who when in earnest is terribly in earnest, whether he is describing the great plain which lies below Malvern Hills, or the marriage of Jobbery to Falsehood, or the shriving of Gluttony and Wrath, or the iniquities of the hated lawyers at Westminster, or the beauty of Charity, or the triumphant march on Hell by Piers Plowman, the man Christ Jesus. Picture after picture paints the same story, preaches the same sermon; and the story and the sermon are these. The world is good enough if man were not so bad; the birds sing blissfully enough if underneath there droned not on the note of misery; life is sweet and jolly enough if men were not so bitter; Malvern Hills are fair enough if only in the plain, in the great Field Full of Folk, there were more charity, more honesty, more simplicity, more useful work, and a greater wish to set forth on the great pilgrimage. This pilgrimage is not to Canterbury or Walsingham or Compostella or Rome; it is a pilgrimage to Truth, the saint whom men so regularly disregard.

" Knowest thou a holy saint that men call Truth?
Canst thou tell us of the way where that saint dwelleth? "

" God bless me, nay," quoth this fellow then.
" Never saw I palmer with pike-staff and with scrip,
That asked after Truth till ye now in this place."

Instead of seeking Truth, men seek money; instead of honouring Love, they honour Wrath; instead of dealing honestly, they bow down before Pride, Flattery, Bribery, Corruption, and Jobbery, branded under the title of Lady Meed, who is the thin disguise of Alice Perrers, the infamous mistress of Edward III. Kings are weak, barons are cats that seize and poss about the people of the realm, knights are idle hunters, lawyers are thieves; monks and nuns are no better than they should be, merchants are swindlers, bankers are coin-clippers, and all the wonderful array of papal officers and English churchmen are mere plunderers of the land, pocket-fillers, and cheaters of the people. As for Friars, " there was one good Friar, in the days of Francis, but that was long ago." Neither Wit nor Learning, Scripture nor Imagination, helps the seeker one

jot in his pilgrimage; words, words, words, are the end of them. The working man, God save the mark, is an idler, a drinker, a spoil-work, a wastrel, a loafer, and an unemployable; the professional beggar, with limbs professionally broken for his trade, is no worse than he; and ruffling Regulars, covetous lords, cheating shopmen, idle priests, lying pilgrims, and fine-furred harlots, jostle one another in the chaos of the scene. Through all, warning all, and at times tearing and punishing all, stalk the shadow forms of Plague and Storm and Famine, regularly visiting England, God's messengers to the generation that have clean forgotten Him; and though Piers Plowman may go down to Hell and fetch Humanity from Satan's grip, yet there rises the dread shape of Antichrist and sweeps that sweet and gentle figure from the scene; "and it was night."

This is the first impression that one gets of the book known as *Piers Plowman*; but it is a first impression only. Another reading shows another side. Kings may be weak, but they are resolved to deal sharply with Lady Meed. Reason and Conscience have by no means left the land; they plead passionately for the punishment of Wrong (the king's officer). Barons and knights are not all wicked; they can rule far better than the people could who would try their hand at government; and it is they who will, when the time comes, bring the Church to the bar of judgment. Gentlemen are willing and even anxious, though almost impotent, to help against the disorders of the day; some lawyers here and there will plead for God's poor and take no fee for it; some monks and nuns stay in their convents, some hermits in their cells, and there they work or pray; some honesty is still left in trade; and a bishop here and there knows his business, and parish priests here and there do not skip away to London, but stay in their parishes and comfort and feed their people. Unity and Peace and Conscience and Charity never cease to do their work in the human heart, and they raise the banner of the Christ in the field of Armageddon. The working man, the real, true, leal, honest, uncomplaining, working man, is up early and hard at work for very few pence; the cottage woman holds her head up and "puts a good face on it;" some of the beggars are Christ's poor who can perforce do nothing but lie as Lazarus did at Dives' door; and in the mob that fill

the Malvern plain, stretching to Worcester roofs, are honest traders, good ancres, and a stray woman of the streets, eager for the great pilgrimage. Through all, warning all, encouraging all, comes at length, though foreshadowed throughout the former scenes, an ordinary man, PIERS PLOWMAN, the people's man, the people's Christ, poor humanity adorned with love, hardworking humanity armed with indignation, sympathetic humanity clad in the intelligence that knows all and—makes allowances; at one time setting high-born ladies to work, at another passionately attacking the insolent priest, at another calling upon Famine to help him against the loafing, growling wastrel of the streets; but always encouraging the penitent sinful, helping the weak, leading the way in the great journey; a strange figure, Christ in humanity, humanity Christ-clothed, neither all a poor man, nor all a ploughman, nor all a Jesus, but fading and vanishing and reappearing in all forms of his humanised divinity, and ending as the Christ conqueror that from the Cross went down and burst the doors and defied the brazen guns of hell, and brought *Piers Plowmans Fruit* home with victory; yet, even in this majestic battle with Lucifer and Belial, Ragamuffin and Goblin, no omnipotent God far removed from the cares and sorrows of fourteenth-century England, but—

> One like the Good Samaritan and somewhat like Piers Plowman,
> Barefoot, bootless, without spur or spear,
> Riding on an asses back, brightly he lookèd
> Like one that cometh to be dubbèd knight,
> To get him his gilt spurs and his slashed shoon.

This is the general picture of the poem, or of such parts as are here wholly or partly transcribed.

The teaching of the book is negative in that, in face of the tremendous issues, it counsels no opposition to King, Church, Barons, or Knights. It is not inflammatory; it is no harbinger of the Reformation, though it contains a startling prophecy of that great event. It cannot be looked upon as anti-papal, though it was written in the time of the Great Schism; it distinctly disbelieves in the extremes of what the modern world calls democracy, although moral collectivism is its watchword; and it nowhere gives any support to the notion that it foresaw the coming of the great revolt of 1381, or approved of that revolt when it

came. It seems, notwithstanding a few political allusions, to be as remote from politics as are the Gospels themselves, and for the same reason. No form of government, it would say, is in itself bad, if men have the religious spirit; every form of government is bad if they have it not.

On the other hand, the teaching of the book is positive enough, in that it puts its finger on the abuses of the time, lawlessness, falseness, dishonesty, jobbery, money-grubbing, luxury, and idleness. Idleness of all things it cannot away with; the idle rich are scourged as much as the idle poor; idleness, with all its accompanying evils—begging, gluttony, dishonourable dealing, simony, neglect of plain duty, luxury senseless and unbridled, idleness is the unpardonable sin; and Professor Minto has sketched a curious parallel between this poem and the teaching of Thomas Carlyle, who possibly never had the book in his hands. If the undecided king is the victim of his circumstances, the wasters among the rich are what they are because they have not enough true work to do. The same may be said of the unworthy prelate—he does not do his true work. It may equally be said of pardoner, merchant, knight, lady, hermit, pilgrim, huckster and hewer, ditcher and delver. Truth (who stands confusedly for God the Father) rules that each man should have his work and do it well; and the heaviest condemnation of Truth is for those in all ranks of life who instead of working go a-hunting or sit by the road and sing "Hey Trolly Lolly" and "God save you, Lady Em." Piers Plowman himself preaches *work*; he puts his mittens on and hangs a basket round his neck, a mock pilgrim, and off he goes to plough his half-acre. Indeed, the motto of the poem might be EACH MAN MUST PLOUGH HIS HALF-ACRE; but it must be ploughed without the thought of self-enrichment at the cost of others. Work is not enough; Pride and Flattery work, traitors work, lechers work, disers and minstrels work, thieves work, Liar works for the Friars, the Friars themselves work, merchants and their 'prentices work, the Pardoner works hard—they are all Judas children. It is not enough to work; a man must work honestly for himself *and* for his fellows; he must work for his religion, for his king, and for his country.

In the humorous section dealing with his own life, the writer condemns himself for idleness; and we in our day

should say he condemns himself with justice. His definite teaching is that of the Gospel, "The poor ye have always with you: more shame to you. Your rich England should have no poor: it is your bounden duty to rid the world of the miserably poor, and you can do it if you will, by making all work for all." "The poor ye shall have always with you" is a text he never refers to, because he knows that he cannot find it in the Gospels. No autocrat can be more severe than he upon those who will not work. He has one word for the able-bodied loafer, and one alone: "Starve him;" and he knows that such an heroic remedy had not been tried in his own day, any more than it has been tried since.

Along with this gospel of true work for self and others, for home and country, is his definite preaching of home sympathy. England for England is his cry throughout the poem. He hates to see the Pope meddle in the appointment of foreigners to livings that have not fallen vacant; he hates to see men carry good English money to Avignon or Rome; he hates to see men make pilgrimages to St. James and St. Peter, when the pilgrimages they should make are to jails and hospitals, and to their poorer neighbours cottages. If Englishmen go to Sinai and Bethlehem to seek the saints, for Gods sake let them stay there, he says; we want no such pilgrims here. You can find your true pilgrimage by going the round of your own parish.

Again, he is definite enough, as we should expect, in his demand for a clean life. The King has his Alice Perrers; she must go; the bishops have their lemans, the hermits and pilgrims their girls; the beggars breed like rabbits, and are never married. Luxury, lust, and lechery spell the same thing for him, and with unnecessary wealth comes unnecessary wantonness. In passage after passage he declaims against the fatal gift of Constantine and legacies to the Church: religion goes a-hunting with a pack of hounds at his tail, and with this wealth in money and lands comes the ill life, the life of wantonness. Stained windows and gorgeous churches, fine vestments and full church pockets, are as much anathema to him as are the evil deeds of Richard II. and of the king's officers who pay the poor in receipts instead of in money, and who rob the honest worker of his horse, of his wife's honour, and his maid's innocence.

He pleads too for a saner education and for wholesome correction. The working man is told to go and get two sticks and beat his idle wife; another is blamed because his wife's bonnet costs three pounds and his own cost five shillings. The gentleman cockers his children because he is afraid of their catching the plague; he never takes a stick to them. "Spare the switch and spill the son" is to him a maxim equally true if it be applied to idler, wife, thief, beggar, or child. He praises the good school, and laments that not enough money is spent in what we should call scholarships.

Finally, he devoutly prays that the Church will reform herself, and prophesies that if she will not do so the king and the barons will reform her in a way she will not like: and for the idler he begs that Famine will return to England, for only in the sharp correction of drought and hunger will England learn her lesson. That she will learn it finally he cannot hope; for after Calvary comes Antichrist, and Pride and Flattery regain their places; and with this his indignant spirit passes sadly into the dark.

No one can quite tell how far the author represents the true picture of his time. He is in general agreement with Chaucer, who was as earnest as he: any one will see this who cares to look below the surface of the *Canterbury Tales*. It is the custom to say Chaucer is the poet of the rich and Langland of the poor; that Chaucer laughed at and tolerated with Horatian *sang-froid* the foibles, the vices, and even the miseries of his day. Nothing, to my mind, can be further from the truth; and the plain fact is that while Langland is sardonic, indignant, fierce, you never know when you turn a page of Chaucer how near you are to tears; and it must be remembered by those who consider Chaucer an aristocrat and Langland a democrat, that Chaucers poems include the figures of the Parson, Janicula, Griselda, the old man of the Pardoners Tale, and the numberless pictures of the good and charitable rich.

The questions that surround this poem as a text are most difficult. The reader may be referred to Professor Skeats monumental edition, of which it is needless to say I have made the fullest use; to Professor Manlys chapter in the second volume of the *Cambridge History of English Literature;* to Jusserands beautiful and loving studies of the

poem; and to the bibliography given in the *Cambridge History*. Any one, however, who would feel the poem as it ought to be felt must have in his hands, if only for an hour, two books, first a black letter copy of the poem which in these days of reprints cries aloud for publicity, and secondly the volume in which Bishop Stubbs in a fine spirit of recognition has written of our author, *Christ in English Literature*.

We do not know for certain what was the original form of the poem; nor do we know when, how, or with what object the great additions to this form were made. The criterion of allusion will not fully serve as a means for settling dates; for when a work written before the days of printing is being, through forty years or more, constantly altered, contemporary allusion may creep in at any time. The utmost that can, at the present moment, be asserted without fear of contradiction is that the poem was written between 1360 and 1400; that it was constantly and in many cases carelessly revised, and large additions were made; that it was known well in some form by 1381, when a part at least of its teaching and the name of its central figure, Piers Plowman, were made free use of by the leaders of the mob which broke into London, hung the archbishop, killed the lawyers, and dragged the Flemings out of the churches to butcher them in the streets, and that traditionally it has thus been, most unfairly, regarded as the herald and literary expression of that mysterious, ill-timed, and unsuccessful movement. The reader will do well to bear in mind that though the temptation to enlarge upon such an unprecedented event as the sack of part of London must have been great, there is no word in the latest recension of this poem to describe, praise or condemn the movement of Wat Tyler, John Straw, or the Rev. John Ball. Most editors explain this allusion-silence of the last recension by saying the poet was afraid, in consequence of the reaction following, to refer to the uprising of the people; I would rather see in his abjuration of revolt, in his failure to describe the revolt, a continuation of the attitude always adopted by him, that what England needed was a change of heart and not an exchange of purses. The hateful relapses into savagery which marked the Jacquerie, the French Revolution, and the lynching states of to-day

would be to him the negation of the spirit of Piers Plowman, and the throwing away of all that men of all classes have laboriously acquired in the domain of legislation, self-government, and self-control. Thus I hold, while admiring greatly the historical novel called *Long Will*, that the talented authoress, Miss Florence Converse, has erred in her interpretation of the part played by the author and his poem in the troublesome days and awful scenes which marked the year 1381.

And if one is uncertain about the exact date of composition, we are still more in doubt as to the authorship. The poem is attributed variously to Robert or William Langland of Cleobury Mortimer and to William Langley; but no outside allusion of any importance save that of tradition tells us who the writer was. We gather his biography, if it can so be called, from his work. The humorous description of himself occurring only in one text may have been added at any date and by any chantry priest or other person, and it is impossible to say what he means by it; and this section, the fable of the rats, the long additions which follow Gods bull of pardon, and the interludes of the Harrowing of Hell and the Coming of Antichrist, seem to the present editor to point to the composite character of the authorship, a composite character strongly maintained by Professor Manly and denied by Jusserand. It is often forgotten that when a poem dealing with social miseries is produced it may be made a vehicle to represent the feelings and aspirations of thousands more than the author; and that when in addition it becomes popular and is written in an easily imitable form, many hands, authorised and unauthorised, set to work to help, alter, continue, strengthen, weaken, and enlarge. One thinks instinctively of the Book of Psalms, the prophecies of Isaiah, the plays of Shakespeare, the Sonnets of Shakespeare, the Wiclif Bible, the Anglo-Saxon Gospels, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, all of which were (and some of which are still) assigned to one individual author or editor, though criticism has in nearly every case disputed the absolute claims set up for David, Isaiah, Shakespeare, Wiclif, Alfred, and Homer respectively. Such a composite authorship, I think, is the only thing that will account for the almost senseless "improvements" which we con-

tinually meet with in the latest text: and I believe that a careful comparative study of the texts themselves will do more to clear up difficulties than any reasoning from history or allusion. Such study the poem has not yet received. The metre and dialect have received fullest attention; but they yield more information about the scribes than about the author. Yet the scribes themselves may have been the chief offenders.

If we try to reconstruct from a careful reading what manner of man or men penned these visions, we might arrive at some picture like the following. They were or he was a man who loved the country for its birds and flowers, but loved London better for its people; who had been to school and read and remembered eagerly and lovingly, with greater intelligence than care, the Latin Bible and the Latin Fathers; who lived a precarious, poor, tramping life of mass or chantry priest, earning little and continually consorting, partly by choice and partly by necessity, in the most intimate way, with friars, theologians, merchants, pilgrims, beggars, drunkards, loose women, and with the honest and hard-working poor; who knew all the tricks of shop and cheaping, of mendicancy and mendacity; who was not averse from honest idleness, and who was stung to penitence and indignation by what he saw, heard, and felt in himself and in those around him; who hated the trickery, the aristocracy, and intricacies of law which he did not understand, and who loved the scenes in the gentleman's dining-hall and in the taverns, where he was quite at home; who abhorred—perhaps with envy—the easy life of the rich noble and the fat priest; who by his reading, his monastic training, and his own poverty imagined that the saviour of society would come from and belong to the only class he thoroughly understood; who wrote roughly the rough alliterative verse, indigenous to the land and very pedestrian, but who in his inspired hours, which were many, almost rose, notwithstanding his awkward tools, to the spiritual heights of Bunyan and Shelley and to the poetic heights of the Old Testament prophets. Like Bunyan and Shelley, he lived in stormy times; like them, he had, as an individual, been through some of the moral cataclysms of which he spoke; like them, he was prone to fall, but ready to rise; but he did not use the nervous

beauty of Bunyans prose or the metaphysical wings of Shelleys scholarship, strengthened by his unearthly and Titanic force. This, however, was his advantage, for his work was capable of being enlarged and successfully imitated. For he wrote for the ordinary man, who, whether he be king or baron, bishop or pardoner, merchant or Lombard, hermit or pilgrim, knight or knave, may, if his heart counsel him, echo the last words:

> "I will become a pilgrim,
> And wend as wide as the world lasteth
> To seek—Piers Plowman."

ARTHUR BURRELL.

ISLEWORTH, *January* 1, 1912.

## USEFUL BOOKS

Professor Skeat's edition of *Piers Plowman.* 2 vols.
J. Jusserand, *L'épopée Mystique* (the book has been translated).
Professor Manly's chapter and bibliography in the *Cambridge History of English Literature.*
Black Letter editions of the Poem (British Museum).
Trevelyan's *England in the Times of Wyclif.*
Cutts' *Scenes of the Middle Ages.*
Florence Converse, historical novel, *Long Will.*
Riley's *Illustrations of London Life from Original Documents.*
Bishop Stubbs' *Christ in English Literature.*

Much interesting matter will be found in pamphlets and magazines. These can be identified *s.v.* Langland or Plowman, or in the bibliographies of Periodical Literature in the British Museum.

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Piers the Plowman. Printed by R. Crowley, 1550; by Owen Rogers, 1561; Edited with notes, glossary, etc., by T. D. Whitaker, 1813; by T. Wright (with the Crede), 1842, 1856, 1895; by W. W. Skeat, E.E.T.S., 1867, etc.; with Richard the Redeless, 1873; for Clarendon Press Series, 1869, 6th ed., revised, 1891; three parallel texts, with Richard the Redeless, notes, glossary, etc. (Clarendon Press), 1886.

Parallel extracts from 29 MSS. of Piers the Plowman, W. W. Skeat, E.E.T.S., 1866; In Modern Prose, with introduction by K. Warren, 1895, 1899; by W. W. Skeat (King's Classics), 1905.

See J. M. Manly, Piers the Plowman and its Sequence, Cambridge History of Literature, vol. ii.; and E.E.T.S., 1908; and Jusserand, Piers the Plowman, the work of one or of five, 1909.

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To all who understand or would understand

# PIERS PLOWMAN

I saw myself, a youth, almost a boy, in a low-pitched wooden church. The slim wax candles gleamed, spots of red, before the old pictures of the saints. There stood before me many people, all fair-haired peasant heads. From time to time they began swaying, falling, rising again, like the ripe ears of wheat when the wind in summer passes over them. All at once a man came up from behind and stood beside me. I did not turn towards him, but I felt that the man was Christ. Emotion, curiosity, awe, overmastered me. I made an effort and looked at my neighbour. A face like everyones, a face like all mens faces. The eyes looked a little upward, quietly and intently; the lips closed, not compressed; the upper lip as it were resting on the other; a small beard parted in two; the hands folded and still; and the clothes on him like everyones.

"What sort of Christ is this?" I thought. "Such an ordinary, ordinary man. It cannot be." I turned away, but I had hardly turned my eyes from this ordinary man when I felt again that it was really none other than Christ standing beside me. Suddenly my heart sank and I came to myself. Only then I realised that just such a face is the face of Christ—a face like all mens faces.

Turgeniev.

Ȝ wente forth wyde-where walkynge myn one
Ȝn a wyde wyldernesse.

# THE VISION
OF THE
# FIELD FULL OF FOLK

# PIERS PLOWMAN

## THE VISION OF THE FIELD FULL OF FOLK [1]

In a summer season, when soft was the sun,
In rough cloth I robed me, as I a shepherd were,
In habit like a hermit in his works unholy,
And through the wide world I went, wonders to hear.

But on a May morning, on Malvern hills,
A marvel befel me —sure from Faery it came—
I had wandered me weary, so weary, I rested me
On a broad bank by a merry-sounding burn;
And as I lay and leaned and looked into the waters
I slumbered in a sleeping, it rippled so merrily,
And I dreamed—marvellously.

All the worlds weal, all the worlds woe,
Truth and trickery, treason and guile,
All I saw, sleeping.

I was in a wilderness, wist I not where,
And eastward I looked against the sun.
I saw a Tower on an hill, fairly fashioned,
Beneath it a Dell, and in the Dell a dungeon,
With deep ditches and dark and dreadful to see,
And Death and wicked spirits dwelt therein,
And all between, between the Hill and Dungeon,

A FAIR FIELD FULL OF FOLK

[1] Readers are referred to the Comment (p. 179) and to the Index for further explanatory matter regarding the poem.

Rich and poor, all manner of men,
Working and wandering as in the world we must.

Some were for ploughing, and played full seldom,
Set their seed and sowed their seed, and sweated hard,
To win what wastrels with gluttony destroy.

Some were for pride, in parade of apparel.

Some were for prayers and penance, ay, many a one,
Living strait lives for love of our Lord
In hope of heavenly bliss,
Anchorites, hermits, that held in their cells,
And coveted not to roam the country side and beg,
Nor with dainty living their body to please.

Some chose merchandise; they throve the best.

And some were for music, the music of minstrels,
Gold getting, gleeful, in an innocent heart.

But jesters and janglers, Judas children,
Feigning their fancies, and fooling the crowds,
With wit enough to work, if work they would,
Paul preacheth about them —no more will I say—
He that speaketh filthily is the Devils man.

There were tramps and beggars fast about flitting,
Crammed with bread in wallet and belly,
Lying for their food, and fighting in the taverns,
Going to bed in gluttony, rising from bed in ribaldry,
Gangs of mean thieves.
Sleep and sorry sloth pursue them ever.

Pilgrims and palmers plighted together,

To seek S. James in Spain, and S. Peter in Rome;
They went upon their way with many a wise tale,
And had leave to lie all their life after.
I saw some of them, O, they had gone the pilgrimage,
—every one a lie—
Each told a different tale and not to truth.
Their tongues tuned to lying,

Hermits, a heap of them, with hooked staves,
Were walking to Walsingham —each had his wench with him—
Great long lubbers, that loth were to work,
Clad in copes to be known for hermits,
To pass for hermits, and have an easy life.

Friars? All the four orders, I found them there,
Preaching to the people, and glosing the gospel
For their own profit.

Many of these masters may dress as they will,
Money and their preaching soon meet one another.
Gods love has turned trader, and the rich pay high,
And we in few years have seen wonderful things.
If Gods love and the Church do not cut down such Friars,
The greatest mischief in the world will mount up full fast.

Look there, a Pardoner, preaching like a priest,
A papal bull he brought, sealed by the bishop,
He can assoil them all, of fasting, falsehood, and of broken vows.

The simple fools believed him, loved his words,
Came and knelt and kissed his bull,
He bunched his "letters" in their faces and blinded their eyes,
And his parchment roll robbed them of rings and brooches.

Thus, men, ye give your gold to keep gluttons going,
And lend it to loafers that follow lechery.

If the bishop were holy and worth both his ears,
He would not send his seal to deceive the people,
But against the bishop your Pardoner preaches not,
For the parson and the Pardoner share the sermon-silver,
Which the parish poor would get if the Pardoner were away.

Some parish priests complained to the bishop,
The parish was poor since the Great Pestilence,
Praying for licence in London to dwell,
And sing masses for souls for silver is sweet.

Bishops and deacons, masters and doctors,
With cures under Christ and tonsured to show it,
Who ought to shrive their people and pray and feed their flocks,
They lie in London, in Lent, ay, all the year;

Some serve the king, collecting his moneys,
In the Court of Chancery, in the wards and ward-motes,
They claim his debts, his dues of waifs and strays.

Conscience accused them, and the commons heard it,
"Ye suffer idolatry in many sundry places,
"And bring your iron-bound boxes to take the untrue tolls.
"Many a wax candle hangs as record of a miracle,
"But all the world knows well, that miracle is none.
"It profiteth your purses and ye prelates suffer it
"That men should live and die and believe—in their ignorance.
"And all the world is worse for this your covetise."

(*The writer digresses*)
What trouble and mischance fell on free Israel,
Through two false priests, Ophni and Phineas.
They were discomfited and lost the ark of God,
And for Eli saw them sin and suffered their evil,
And chastened them not and would not rebuke them,
As it was prophesied, —the ark of God was lost,
And Elis sons were slain.
From his chair where he sat he fell, for sorrow
And brake his neck a-two.
All this was Gods vengeance, he beat not his children,
And, since they were priests and men of Holy Church,
God was the angrier and sooner took his vengeance.

Therefore ye priests and Churchmen who let men worship idols,
Ye who should their fathers be and teach them better,
God shall take vengeance, harder and greater
Than ever on Eli, on Ophni and on Phineas,
For your wicked tolerance, and your own sins.
Your mass and your mattins and many of your Hours
Are done undevoutly; I dread me at the last
Christ in *his* consistory will curse many of you.

I know well the power that Peter had to keep,
To bind and unbind, as the Book telleth.
He left the power, with love, to the four virtues
Cardinal virtues, for they close the gates,
Heavens gates, where Christ dwelleth.
But of court cardinals taking the name of cardinal,
Presuming of themselves a Pope to make,
And holding the power that Peter had,
I will not deny it them, for in love and learning
Lieth the great election of a Pope.

"Speak not against it," saith Conscience, "for Holy Church sake."

(*The narrative proceeds*)

Then came a king knighthood went before him,
The power of the people made him to reign.

Then came Common Sense and made clerks and learned men

That Common Sense and knighthood and the king together,
Should see that the people might gain a living.

With Common Sense the people contrived every craft,
And for profit of all men set apart plowmen,
To till and work, as true life asketh,
To live their day with loyal work while life and land remain.

Then looked up a lean lunatic and knelt and said,
"Christ keep thee, sir king, thee and thy kingdom,
"And grant thee so to rule, that loyalty may love thee
"And thou, for thy righteous rule, find thy reward in heaven."

Then bent an angel down, and spake for the poors sake,
Who cannot jangle in the courts and plead their cause aright,
But they must serve and suffer, for their sakes he said it,
He spake to the clergy and the king.

"King and a Prince art thou,
"To-morrow nothing;
"Thou that of Christ the King
"Dost keep the way,
"Be just, show mercy,
"And carry out His will.
"Mercy is justice still,
"Sow and reap mercy."

Then rose a buffoon, a glutton of words
If the King keep not the Law
He is the name—but not the thing.

And all the people cried to the Council in Latin
Tbe precepts of tbe King
Tbese be our bond of law.

Then ran a rout of rats and small mice with them,
And came to a council for profit of them all.
For a Court Cat came when he would
Leapt among them lightly, caught them as he would,
Perilously played with them and possed them about.
" We dare not look up," said they, " for dread of divers fears,
" And if we grumble at his games he will grieve us all,
" Scratch us and claw us and take us in his paws.
" We loathe our life until he let us be.
" If we with any wit his power might withstand,
" We might be lords on earth and live as we would."

A rat of renown ready of tongue
Told them a sovran cure.
" I have seen great dogs in cities and in towns
" Wearing collars, bright gold, all about their necks,
" Necklaces of crafty work. They go where they will,
" Uncoupled they wend, through warren and waste;
" Were a bell on the collar men might know them—and run.

" Therefore," the rat says, " reason showeth me
" We should buy a brass bell or of bright silver,
" And set it on a collar for profit of us all,
" And hang it on the cats neck. Then can we hear
" When he rides, when he rests, or when he runs to play.
" And if he list to play then we may look
" And appear in his presence while he *will* play.
" And if he be wroth, beware and shun his paths."

All this rout of rats to this reason assented,
But when the bell was bought and on a collar hung.

Was no rat in the rout for all the realm of France
That durst have bound the bell about the cats neck.
And they held themselves cowards and their counsel feeble
And their labour lost.

A mouse that knew much stood forth and said:
"Though we kill the Cat yet another should come
"To snatch us and our kind, though we crept under benches.
"Therefore my counsel is, LET THE CAT BE,
"And be never so bold to show him the bell,
"For I heard my sire say, seven years ago,
"Where the cat is a kitten the Court is full ailing
"Holy Writ witnesseth.
Wo to thee thou land whose king is a child.—*Solomon.*
"For me," quoth the mouse, "I see so much to come
"Never shall cat or kitten by my counsel be hurt
"Nor should men prate of collars. I would never buy collar
"For though it cost me dear, I would hold my counsel
"And suffer the Cat to do as he will.
"Mischief that chastens many will teach the Cat better.
"Were the Cat and his kittens not ready to spring on us,
"We mice would eat up many a mans malt,
"Ye rats would waken men that rest;
"If ye had your will yourselves ye could not rule."
What this rat-dream meaneth ye merry men,
Divine it—I dare not— by dear God in heaven.

There wandered a hundred, in hoods of silk,
Serjeants they seemed, and served at the Bar,
Pleading the Law, for pennies and for pounds,
Unlocking their lips never for love of our Lord.
Thou mightest better mete the mist on Malvern hills
Than get a mutter from their mouths—save thou show thy money.

I saw bold bishops and bachelors of divinity
Made clerks of accounts to serve the king,
Deacons and archdeacons, men full of dignity,
Who should preach to the people and feed the poor,
They leapt away to London (their bishops gave them leave)
To be clerks of the Kings Bench and to despoil the land.

Yet I dreamed more, of mean men and of rich,
Barons and burgesses, bondmen of villages;
I saw in this assembly, as ye shall hear after,
Many a butcher, baker, brewer, tailors and tinkers,
Woolweavers, linenweavers, toll-takers in the markets,
Masons and miners and many another craft,
Ditchers and delvers, that do their work ill,
And spend the livelong day in song, "God save you, Lady Em."
Cooks and their men were crying, "Pies hot, all hot,
"Good pork, good goose; Come, come and dine."
Taverners told the same tale, "A drink of wine for nothing,
"White wine, red wine, to wash the roast meat down."

All this I saw sleeping, nay, seven times more.

# THE VISION OF HOLY CHURCH

# THE VISION OF HOLY CHURCH

WHAT this mountain meaneth and the dark dale
And the FIELD FULL OF FOLK fairly I shall show.

A lady lovely to look on, all in linen clad,
Came from that castle down;
" Will, sleepest thou? " she cried, " Seest thou this people,
" How busy they be in the medley and the maze?
" The greater part that pass upon this earth
" Have their heaven here, they wish no other;
" Of other heaven but this keep they no reckoning."

I was afeard of her face, fair though she was;
" My lady," said I, " what meaneth it all? "

" The Tower on the hill, Truth liveth therein,
" O would that ye wrought as his word teacheth you.
" He is Faiths father, he formed you all;
" He gave you five senses wherewith to serve him.
" Therefore he biddeth earth to help you each one
" With wool, with linen, with needful livelihood,
" In moderate measure that ye may be at ease.
" He of his courtesy set for common use
" Things three, no more; but three are needful.
" The one is clothing, to save thee from chill,
" The one is meat, for thy health sake,
" The third is drink when thou driest but none out of reason
" Lest thou be the worse when thou shouldst work.

" Lot in his lifeday did a lecherous deed,
Wickedly wrought and wrathed God Almighty,

" And all that wicked deed he laid—on wine;
" Through wine and women was Lot snared.
" Dread the delight of drink and thou shalt do the better.
" Though thou long for more, Measure is Medicine.
" What the belly asketh is not all good for the ghost,
" What the soul loveth is not all food for the body.

" Trust not thy body, a liar is his teacher,
" The lying wretched world that would thee betray,
" The Fiend and thy flesh follow hard after thee,
" This one and that pursue thy soul,
" And whisper evil to thy heart. Therefore, beware."

" My lady, thanks," quoth I, " thy teaching I like well,
" But tell me, my lady, of the money of this world
" That men so closely love, to whom belongeth it? "

" Go to the Gospel, hear what God said,
" When with a penny they posed him in the Temple.
" Should they with the penny honour King Cæsar?
" And God them asked of whom the letters spake
" And the image also that stood upon the coin.
" ' Of Cæsar,' said they, ' we know that well enough.'
" ' Render to Cæsar,' quoth he, ' that that Cæsars is,
" ' And what is Gods to God; else ye do ill.'

" Right fully reason should rule you all,
" And Common Sense your warden be
" To be banker of your treasure your wealth to keep,
" Reason, Thrift and Common Sense and give it you at need.

all go together."

Then I would know of her, for His sake that made her,
" The deep dark vale so dreadful to see,
' Beseech thee, my lady, what may *this* mean? "

"Care Castle," said she, "he that cometh therein
"May curse that he was born a body and a soul;
"Therein one dwelleth, whose name is Wrong,
"Father of falseness, he framed it himself;
"He egged to evil Adam and Eve,
"He counselled Cain to kill his brother,
"He cheated Judas with Jewish silver,
"And hung him on the elder tree.
"He is a love-hinderer, he lieth to all
"Who trust in earthly treasure, where Truth is not."

Then I wondered in my wit what woman she might be,
That such wise words from Holy Writ showed me,
And by the High Name I asked to tell me ere she went,
Who she was certainly that counselled me, that taught me.

"Holy Church am I," quoth she, "thou oughtest me to know,
"I took thee in my arms first I made thee free.
"To me thou broughtest sureties to do all my bidding
"All thy life long to love me, to believe me."

Then I kneeled down and cried her grace,
And prayed her piteously to pray for my sins,
And eek to teach me kindly on Christ to believe,
That I might work His will who made me man:
"Teach me no treasure-gaining but tell me this,
"Thou that art called a saint, how may I save my soul?"

"When all treasures are tried, TRUTH IS THE BEST.
"GOD IS LOVE. To this text I appeal.
"It is as dear a treasure as dear God himself;
"This tells thee Truth.
"For he who is True with his tongue, True with his hands,



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"Working True works therewith, and wishing ill to none,
"He is a god, the gospel says, in earth and heaven,
"And by S. Lukes words like to our Lord.
"The learned know it and should teach it everywhere,

"For Christians and unChristians claim to be taught the Truth.

"Kings and knights should keep the Truth,
"Righteously roaming the realm around,
"Taking transgressors, tying them fast,
"Till Truth determine their trespass to the end.
"David in his day dubbed his knights
"And made them swear on the sword to serve Truth ever;
"That is the plain profession belonging unto knights,
"*And not to fast on Friday for a hundred years,*
"But to serve him or her that asketh for the Truth,
"And never to leave them for money or for favour.
"The knight that doth it not is traitor to his order;
"His duty is not to fast and not to doff his shirt,
"But faithfully defend and fight for Truth.

"When God began heaven in the great bliss of it,
"He made knights in his courts, creatures ten,
"Cherubim, Seraphim, seven more and one other,
"Lucifer loveliest, next to our Lord.
"He was an archangel, one of Gods knights,
"But he brake his obedience and lost his bliss,
"And from that fellowship, in a Fiends likeness,
"Fell to deep hell to dwell evermore.
"More thousands with him than man could number
"Leapt with Lucifer in loathly form
"For they believed him and his lying words:
**I shall sit in the sides of the north: like I shall be to the Highest."**

(*The writer speaks*)

Lord, why should he then — the wretched Lucifer
Leap to the north — and abide not in the sun?
Were it not for northern folk — I could you tell
But I blame none.
Safer by far is it — where the sun reigneth.

And where the fiend flew — he failed and fell
Where he is hell is — and he there bound
And over against him—Christ.

(*The narrative proceeds*)

"Then fell he and his fellows, — they turned to fiends,
"Out of heaven into hell — fast they hobbled,
"Some in air are, some on earth, — some in deep hell,
"And all that work wrong — after their death-day
"Shall wend to him — and dwell with that shrew.
"But they that work well, — as Holy Writ telleth,
"Eastward to heaven shall go, — there to abide
"Where is the throne of Truth.
"Teach it to the simple — the learned know it well,
"TRUTH IS TREASURE — the best tried on earth."

"Nay, but I know not," quoth I, — "ye must teach me better.
"How doth Truth grow in me? — is it beyond my ken?"

"Thou doted daff, — dull is thy wit,
"Little Latin hast thou learnt in the days of thy youth."
**Woe for my barren youth days spent in vain.**
"Thou knowest, well enough. To love the Lord
"And rather than do deadly sin to die.
**Better die than live ill.**

"This is Truth, I trow, — whoso can teach thee better
"Suffer *him* to tell thee — and learn *his* lesson;

"Truth telleth thee that Love is the treacle of sin,
"A sovran salve for body and soul.
"Love is the plant of Peace, most precious of the virtues,
"Heaven could not hold it, so heavy was Love,
"Till it had of this earth eaten its fill;
"Then never lighter was a leaf upon a linden tree,
"Than Love was when it took the flesh and blood of man.
"Fluttering, piercing as a needles point,
"No armour may it stay, nor no high walls.

"Therefore is Love the leader of the Lords folk in heaven
"And, as a mayor, a mediator between the king and people.
"Right so Love shapes the law on man for his misdeeds,
"Love lays on man the payment due.
"In thy hearts conscience, in the deep well of thee,
"In thy heart and in thy head the mighty Truth is born;
"That was the Fathers deed, that formed us all,
"And looked on us with love, and let his Son die
"Meekly for our misdeeds.
"And yet Christ willed no woe on them that wrought him pain,
"With his meek mouth he prayed for mercy,
"For pity on the people that pained him to his death.

"Therefore I counsel you, ye rich, have pity on the poor,
"Though ye be mighty at the law be ye meek in your deeds;
"The same measure ye mete, wrong or right;
"Ye shall be weighed therewith when ye go hence.

"Though thou be true tongued, though thou trade honestly,
"And be innocent as a wean that weepeth at its christening,
"Save thou love loyally, and lend to the poor,

" And share with him in godly wise Gods gifts to *thee*,
" Your Masses and your Hours bring you no more merit
" Than slut Malkyns maidenhead that none desireth.

" James the gentle said in his writings,
" Faith without fact is nothing worth,
" As dead as a door-tree unless deeds follow.
**Faith without works is dead.**

" Chastity without charity lies chained in hell,
" It is but as an unlighted lamp.
" Many chaplains are chaste, but where is their charity?
" There are no harder, hungrier men than men of Holy Church,
" None more avarous than they when they are set on high,
" Unkind to kinsmen and to all Christian souls,
" They eat up their 'charity' and grumble for more.

" Many parish priests are clean in body,
" But, cumbered with covetise, they cannot drive it forth,
" So close hath avarice clasped them together,
" Avarice is no virtue, it is hell treachery,
" It teaches the lay people ungenerously to give,
" Therefore in the gospel these words be written,
**Give and it shall be given to you**; I gave you all.

" This is the key of love, it openeth Gods grace,
" To comfort the sorrowful that are with sin entangled.
" Love is the leech of life, next to our Lord,
" It is the graft of grace, it is the nearest road to heaven.

" Therefore I say to thee,
" All treasures tried, TRUTH IS THE BEST;
" Love it," quoth she, " no longer may I stay
" Learning thee what Love is," and with that she left me.

# THE VISION OF LADY MEED

AND OF HER

# MARRIAGE TO FALSEHOOD

# THE VISION OF LADY MEED

YET kneeled I on my knees, and cried her grace,
" Mercy, my lady, for Marys love of heaven,
" That bare the blissful Child, who bought us on the Rood,
" By some craft teach me to know the False."

" Look on thy left hand, lo, where he standeth,
" Falsehood and Flattery, and many of their friends."

I looked on my left hand, as the Lady told me,
And was ware of a woman, wonderly clad,
Her robe fur-edged, the finest on earth,
Crowned with a crown, the king hath no better,
Fairly her fingers were fretted with rings,
And in the rings red rubies, as red as a furnace,
And diamonds of dearest price, and double sapphires,
Sapphires and beryls poison to destroy.

Her rich robe of scarlet dye,
Her ribbons set with gold, red gold, rare stones;
Her array ravished me; such riches saw I never;
I wondered who she was, and whose wife she were.

" What is this woman," said I, " so wonderly clad? "

Quoth she, " That is Meed the maid;
" She hath slandered my love she oft hath harmed me,
" And belied her to lords that is named Loyalty,
" In the Popes palace, that have the laws to keep.
she is private as I,

"But Truth would not have it so, for Meed is a bastard,
"Falsehood her father is with fickle tongue,
"That, since he came to earth, never said sooth,
"And Meed is mannered after him, as nature will.

**Like father, like son: Every good tree maketh good fruits.**

"I should be higher than she, of better stock I came,
"My father, the Great God, ground of all grace,
"One God without beginning, and I his good daughter.
"He gave me Mercy that I might marry him.
"Any man that is merciful and loves me true
"Shall be my lord and I his love in the high heaven;
"And he that taketh Meed to wife, I wager my head,
"Shall lose for love of her a heap of Gods charity.
"How speaketh David King of men that take Meed,
"And of men on the earth who maintain the truth,
"And of the way to safety? The Psalter beareth witness:

**Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle? etc.**

"And now will Meed be wedded all to a cursèd shrew,
"False Fickle-Tongue, begotten of a fiend.
"Flattery with his fair speech this people hath enchanted
"And Liar brought it about, and to-morrow is the bridal.
"There shalt thou know the small and the great
"That belong to the lordship of Flattery and Meed.
"Blame them not, let them be, keep thy tongue still,
"Till Honesty punish; then say thy say.
"I leave thee to Christ, and his clean mother,
"Be thou but good and save thee from Covetise."

Then my lady left me lying there asleep
And dreaming I beheld

## THE MARRIAGE OF MEED

When she had gone from me I looked and beheld
All the rich retinue, whose root is false-living,
Were bidden to the bridal, poor and rich,
Knights, clerks and commons, jurymen and summoners,
Sheriffs and sheriffs men, beadles and bailiffs,
Middlemen, brokers, victuallers, pleaders;
No reckoning the rout that ran at Meeds heels.

They sent Simony to seal the papers,
That Falsehood and Flattery for their fines held,
To make them over Meeds dowry for ever.
There was no hall nor house that could harbour the people,
And EVERY FIELD WAS FULL OF FOLK.

On a mountain, in midst of it, at mid-morning tide,
They pitched a proud pavilion, and ten thousand tents,
For knights from afar and for strange comers,
For jurors, for summoners, for labourers on farms,
For the flattering Friars, all the Four Orders,
That all might witness what the writing said,
When Meed was married to Falsehood.

Simony, Law and Juryman were Meeds nearest friends,
But Flattery was the first to fetch her from her bower,
To give her away and join her to Falsehood.
When Simony and Lawyer saw their desire,
They assented thereto —at Silvers prayer.

Then leaped out Liar, "A charter, a charter,
"That Guile with great oaths hath given them both."
And Simony and Lawyer stood forth both of them
Unfolding the deed that Falsehood had writ;
Thus they began, and loud they cried:
**Know all men by these presents . . .**
"Witness all men dwelling on the earth,

" Meed is here married, not for virtue nor rank,
" But—for her goods.
" Falsehood loveth her, for he knoweth her riches,
" Flattery Fickle-speech granteth the pair—
" To be princes in pride, to despise poverty,
" To backbite, to boast, to bear false witness,
" To scorn men, to scold men, to beget slanders,
" To be bold to disobey, to break the Commandments,
" With the kingdom of Covetise and all the coasts about,
" With the island of Usury, I crown these two.
" Gluttony and Oaths I give them as their own,
" To serve the devil with all delights and lusts.
" I grant possession in Sloths service
" Of the earldom of Envy and the Castle of Strife;
" I grant them all.

" Bargain and brokerage, and the borough of Theft,
" All that lordship of Lechery, its length and breadth,
" In its words, its works, its watching eyes,
" In its raiment, its longings, its idle thoughts,
" When lust willeth, and flesh at last faileth."

Gluttony gave them, and swore it with oaths,
To drink the long day at divers taverns,
To jangle and jest, and judge their fellow-Christians,

To eat on fast-days, to feast before the hour,
And sit and sup till sleep came over them,
To breed like town swine to be slothful and sleek,
To wake in despair with no will to do better:
" (They shall think they be lost, this is the end of them;)
" To have and to hold and their heirs after them
" A home with the devil, and be damned for ever,
" With all the appurtenance of purgatory and hell,
" To dwell in woe with Satan while God is in heaven."

In witness of this, Wrong signed first,
Peter the Pardoner of Crutched Friars,
Bett the Bucks beadle, Reynold the reeve,
Mund the Miller, and many another,
*Dated—the Devil,* this deed I seal,
*Witness Parson Simony,* Lawyer agreeing.

(THEOLOGY PROTESTS)

Then answered Theology and said to Lawyer:
" Sorrow upon thee, to bring about such wedding,
" For Meed is a lady, daughter of Amends,
" Though Falsehood her father was, Amends was her mother,
" And save Amends consent she may not be wedded.
" God granteth Meed to Truth,
" Thou hast given her to Guile, God give thee sorrow,
" The text telleth not so; Truth knoweth sooth
**The labourer is worthy of his Meed.**

" I, Theology, know how Laurence the Levite
" Lying on the gridiron near unto death,
" Looked up and cried to God, ' Open heavens gates,
" ' For I, man, of thy mercy have deserved MEED; '
" And since a man may in heaven merit MEED of God
" It seemeth right on earth to wed MEED to Truth.

" All by lies thou livest and lecherous works.
" Simony and thou shame Holy Church;
" The lawyers and ye hurt the people;
" Ye shall abide it dear by God that made me;
" Well ye know, ye liars, if your wits are worth aught,
" That Falsehood is faithless and fickle in works,
" Beelzebubs bastard, and Meed a high-born maiden
" And might kiss the king as his cousin if she would.
" Work ye by wisdom and by common sense,

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" And lead her to London where law is given,
" If any law will let them lie together;
" Ay, though any judges judge she may be joined to Falsehood,

" Yet beware of wedding them, —Wise is the Truth;
" And Conscience is with him and knoweth each one of you,
" If he find you at fault and by falsehood holden,
" It shall at the last press sore on your souls."

To this Civil Law agreed but not Sir Simony,
Nor yet the lawyers —till silver had changed hands.

Then Flattery fetched florins, florins in heaps,
And bade Guile give gold all about,
To the lawyers in special, " that none of them fail us,"
And bade him fee Falsewitness with florins enow;
" He can win Meed over and bring her to my will."

When this gold was given great thankings were made
To Falsehood and Flattery for their fair gifts,
And men came and comforted Falsehood.
" Sure, sir, we shall not cease till Meed be thy wedded wife,
" For we have mastered Meed by our merry talk.
" She is ready to go with a good will to London,
" To see if Law will join you two in joy for evermore."
Then was Falsehood merry and Flattery blithe,
And every man summoned in all shires about,
And bid them be ready, poor and rich,
To wend with them to Westminster, to witness this deed.

## (THE JOURNEY TO WESTMINSTER)

Then looked they for horses to carry them thither,
Yet hacks had they none save hacks that were hired,
But Guile began to borrow from many a great lord,

And Flattery brought out foals of the best;
He set Meed on a sheriff, shod all new,
Falsehood on a juryman, trotting softly,
Flattery on a flatterer, with fair trappings.

The lawyers had no horses, angry men were they,
For Simony and Civil Law must needs go a foot;
And Simony and Civil swore summoners should be saddled,
And Provisors be apparelled in palfrey wise.

"Deans and subdeans," quoth Civil, "come you together,
"Archdeacons, officials, and all you registrars,
"Saddle them with silver bribes to make sins the lighter,
"Adultery, divorce, and the dark ways of usury.
"They shall carry the bishops to do their visitations,
"Paulines people shall serve me to complain in the courts,
"Harness the Bishops officer, he shall draw us in a cart,
"And buy us victuals from his fines for fornication;
"And get from Liar a long cart to carry all the lot of them,
"Friars and beggars that are running on their feet."

Thus Falsehood and Flattery fared forth together,
And Meed in the midst of all and all the household after.
I have no time to tell the rag-tag that followed them,
Of many manner of men that live upon earth;
Guile went ahead and guided them all.

True-talk looked well at Guile and said but little,
But spurred his palfrey, and passed them all,
And came to the kings Court, and told it Conscience,
And Conscience told the king.

"Now," says the king, "by Christ, if I can catch
"Falsehood or Flattery or any of their fellows,

"I would wreak vengeance on wretches that do so,
"And hang them by the neck, and all that maintain them;
"Never in this world shall man go bail for any one,
"But as the Law looketh on men shall sentence fall on all.

"Attach those traitors," he commands a constable,
"Tether Falsehood fast in spite of all his gifts,
"And roll off Guiles head, let him go no further,
"And bring Meed before me in face of them all.

"For Simony and Civil Law, I send you to warn them
"For fear the Church be harmed by them for ever.
"And if ye catch Liar let him not scape,
"Till he be set in the pillory for all his prayers,
"Watch for them well, let none evade thee."

Dread stood at the door and heard the kings judgment,
And went and bade Falsehood flee and all his fellows.
Falsehood for fear then flew to the friars,
And Guile hurried aghast at thought of death,
But the merchants met him and made him stay with them,
And shut him in their shops to show men their wares,
And dressed him as a 'prentice to serve the people.

Lightly Liar leapt away thence,
Lurking in by-ways, lugged here and there,
He was nowhere welcome for his many tales,
Hooted everywhere, bad pack and go.

But the Pardoners had pity and pulled him in to them,
They washed him and wiped him, and wound him in a gown,
And sent him out on Sundays with bishops seals to churches,
To give pardons by the pound to all people—for pence.

Then the doctors heard of this and wrote Liar letters
To come and stay with them, and study mens water.

Spicers spoke with him to look at their ware,
For he was learned in their craft and knew many a gum.
Minstrels and messengers met Liar once,
And maintained him half a year and eleven days.

But Friars with their fair speech fetched him off thence,
And coped him like a Friar, that none who came should know him,

Yet hath he leave to leap out as often as he will,
And is welcome when he cometh and oft with them dwelleth.

Simony and Civil Law sent messages to Rome
And put them in the Popes hands and appealed against the king,
But Conscience accused them;
" Sir King," says he, " save clerks amend,
" Thy kingdom through their avarice will wholly change,
" And Holy Church be harmed for ever."

All fled for fear and flew to hiding places,
None durst abide save Meed the maid,
And truth to tell, she shook for fear,
And when she was attached she wrung her hands and wept.

# THE VISION OF LADY MEED TRIED BEFORE THE KING

# THE VISION OF LADY MEED TRIED BEFORE THE KING

Now is Meed the maid, by bedels and bailiffs,
None other with her, brought before the king.
Then the king called a clerk, his name I know not,
To take her and set her at ease.

"I will assay her, myself will question her,
"What man upon earth she loveth best,
"And if she doth wisely and followeth my will,
"I will forgive her this guilt, so God help me."
The clerk took Meed and led her to the chamber;
Mirth was made and minstrelsy Meed to please withal;
They that dwell at Westminster all honour her.

Joyfully, gently, came the Justices
Where this beauty dwelt; they hurried to her bower,
Gat leave of the clerk and offered her comfort:
"Mourn not, Meed, make thou no sorrow,
"We will counsel the king, we will shape thy path,
"Thou shalt wed as thou wilt, and whom thou wilt,
"For all that Conscience may plot or do.
"Might and mastery shall be thine and to do thine own pleasure
"With King, with Commons, and with Court."
Meed thanked them mildly and gave to each
A cup of gold, or a goblet of silver,
Or a ruby ring, or other rich gift;
The least man of her crew had a golden piece,
And with that they took their leave.

Then came the Clerks to comfort her;
" Be blithe, we be thy men,
" To work thy will while life endureth."

And Meed sweetly promised the same:
" I will love you loyally, and make lords of you,
" And get livings for you, —while your silver lasteth—
" And buy you benefices; ye shall be pluralists,
" And your names be called aloud in the Bishops courts.
" If I love a clerk, no ignorance shall stay him,
" I am well known, he shall go forward,
" And cunning clerks that know me not shall couch behind."

Then came a Confessor, gowned like a Friar,
And whispered soft as though in shrift:
" Though gentle and simple have lain by thy side,
" And Falsehood kept thee mistress this forty year,
" For a load of wheats price I will assoil thee,
" And will be thy beadsman and will do thine errands
" Among clerks and knights and Conscience defeat."

Then Meed kneeled to the man for all her evil deeds,
And shrove her of her sins, the shameless one;
Told him a tale and gave him a guinea,
To be her beadsman and her go-between.

And he assoiled her of her sins, and said:
" We have a window a-making, 'twill cost us high,
" Wilt thou glaze the gable, Meed, and grave thy name thereon?
" Sure shall thy soul be to see heaven;
" At mass and at mattins we will sing for thy soul,
" In thine honour solemnly as Sister of our Order."

Lovely she laughed and said:
" If that I wist
" I would not make or mend
" I will be your friend, Friar,
" While ye show love to lords
" And blame not those ladies
" 'Tis but frailty of flesh
" If one scape the slander,
" 'Tis but one of the seven sins,
" Be merciful, Friar,
" And I will cover your kirk,
" I will whiten and glaze
" I will paint the picture
" Every wight shall see and say:
there is no window nor altar
and write MEED thereon;
I will never fail you,
that follow lèchery,
that love the same,
—from it we all come—
soon the harm is mended;
none sooner shriven.
to them that follow it,
and I will build your cloister,
your walls and your windows,
of her that paid for the making,
' MEED—Sister of the Order."'

(*The writer speaks to his generation*)

But God defend all good folk
Or to write in church windows
For with your name is painted
God knoweth your conscience
And what you spend and what you hoard
Lords, leave such work
Or to call the priest to help you
Perchance here only is your reward
**Let not thy left hand know . . .**
Thus, says the Gospel,
Give it so privily
In mens sight, or in your soul;
Who is courteous, who kind,
such graving of your names,
your well-done deeds,
Pride and worldly pomp.
and your own heart,
and whose was the spent money.
to write your names in windows,
when you give your charity,
and here your heaven.
should good men do their alms,
that no pride be seen
God himself knoweth
who covetous, who free.

(*He turns to speak of corruption in small trade and of adulteration*)

Women that bake and brew,
They are the people
They harm the poor
butchers and cooks,
that harm the poor,
who can but buy in penny-worths,

And secretly and oft they poison them;
They grow rich on their retail with what the poor should eat,
They buy houses, they become landlords,
If they sold honestly they would not build so high,
Nor buy their tenures.
Mayors and their officers the kings go-betweens
Between the king and commons to keep the laws,
They should punish these in pillories and stocks.

And the poor kneel and cry to Christ to avenge them
Here on earth or else in hell.

But Meed the maiden besought the mayor
To take a bribe of all these hucksters:
"Or take you presents, (the coin avoiding),
"Silver cups and rings, and uphold their ways,
"For love of me love them all,
"And suffer them to sell somewhat against the law."

**In whose hand wickednesses be; their right hand is fulfilled with gifts.**

Solomon the sage he made a sermon,
To amend mayors and them that carry out the laws,
He witnesseth what cometh when men take Meed:

**Fire shall destroy their tabernacles that gladly take gifts.**

"Fire shall fall and burn all to blue ashes
"The houses and the homes of them that ask for gifts,
"Presents and yearly gifts, because of their office."

(*The narrative proceeds*)

Then came the king from his Council house and called for Meed,
And sent for her to see him, I saw not who brought her.
Courteously as became a king the king blamed her,
Blamed her a little for loving Guile,
And for wishing to be wedded without his will,
Till Truth had brought her a token from himself.
"Foolishly, woman, hast thou often done;

"I have forgiven thee many a time and granted thee my grace,
"Thee and thine, in hope thou shouldst amend,
"But the longer I let thee go the less truth is with thee,
"And never hast thou worse done than to take to thee Falsehood;
"Hence to thy death-day do so no more;
"God forbid that any more thou trouble Truth and me.
"If thou shalt so do in Corfe Castle I shall shut thee,
"Or in a place far worse to live there as a nun,
"And hurt thee and harm thee that all wanton women
"Shall be ware by thy case and shall ban thee and thine.
"I will teach thee to love truth and take counsel of Reason.

"I have a knight named Conscience; he came from afar;
"If he will wed thee, wilt thou have *him?*"

"Yea, my lord," saith she, "God forbid it me
"If I be not at thy bidding, hang me at once."
Then was Conscience called to come and appear
Before the king and his council.
To wit the kings will Conscience kneeled low and what he must do.

"Wilt thou wed this woman if I assent?
"She is fain to be thy fellow and thy mate."

"Christ forbid," quoth Conscience,
"Woe betide me, if such a wife I wed,
"She is frail of her faith, fickle in her speech,
"She maketh men sin many score times,
"Trust in her treasure betrayeth many,
"To wives and widows she teacheth wantonness,
"Your father she killed through her false behests,
"She poisoneth Popes and harmeth the Church;

" Chattering in her tongue, lustful of her body,
" As common as the pavement to every man that walketh,
" Monks and minstrels, lepers in hedges,
" Gentle and simple, are her lovers when they will;
" Jurymen and summoners are the men that praise her,
" Sheriffs in shires were lost if MEED were gone;
" She taketh mens life and land, setteth laws prisoners free,
" She payeth the gaolers gold to let the false go far and wide,
" And taketh true men by the top and bindeth and hangeth them,
" For hatred she hangeth them who never did her harm.
" For excommunication she careth not a rush,
" She giveth the bishops man a cope and his clerk a coat,
" When she will she is assoiled of sin, and in one month can do
" What the kings secret seal can do in three,
" For she is in the Popes secrets —foreign priests know it—
" Simony and she seal the Popes letters.

" She consecrateth bishops, ignorant though they be,
" She giveth parsons prebends, she abetteth priests
" With their mistresses and darlings all their life long,
" To bring forth children against the Church law.
" Woe to the realm when MEED is well with the king.

" With her jewels, by Jesus, she shameth your justices,
" And fighteth against Law and stoppeth Faith at the gate,
" He may not get forth, her florins fly so thickly;
" She leadeth Law where she pleaseth and holdeth her courts
" And maketh men through love of her lose what justice oweth.

" To the poor the courts are a maze
" Law is so lordly
" Without money paid in presents

if he plead there all his life,
and loth to end his case;
Law listeneth to few.

" Barons and burgesses
" And all that are care-worn

she bringeth to sorrow,
and would live in truth.

" Clergy and avarice
" This is that ladys life,
" And all that uphold her,
" Poor men have no chance
" No, though they be in pain,

she coupleth together;
God give her sorrow,
mischance betide them,
to plead their cause,
so strong is MEED."

Then Meed wept
To give her grace to speak;
" Excuse thee if thou canst,
" For Conscience accuseth thee

and prayed the king
and the king granted it:
I can say but that,
and would exile thee for ever."

" Nay, my lord," quoth she,
" When ye wot truly

" believe him not a whit,
with whom the wrong lieth.

" Wherever great mischief is
" And Conscience knoweth
" Nor to deprave him,
" Well knowest thou, false one,
" Thou hast hung on my side
" Hast had thy grip on my gold
" It maketh me wonder
" I can crown thee with gifts,

there MEED can help,
I came not to chide
with a proud heart.
unless thou wilt lie,
ten times and more
to give it where pleased thee,
why thou art wroth with me.
help thee more than thou knowest;

" Foully thou defamest me
" I never killed no king,
" Not for me was the king hurt

here before the king.
no, nor counselled it,
that time in Normandy;

" Thou, Conscience, shamedst him, creptest into tents for cold,
" Thou thoughtest winter never would cease,
" Thou fearedst death for the dim cloud,
" Hurriedst to England for thy hungry belly.

" Thou, robber pitiless, robbest the poor;
" Poor mens money hadst thou Calais to sell.

" I stayed there with my lord his life to save,
" I made his men merry and stopped all mourning,
" I patted their backs, I boldened their hearts,
" I made them hop for hope to get MEED when they would;
" Had I been marshal of his men, by Mary of Heaven,
" I durst have wagered my life, no less wager,
" He should have had France in length and in breadth,
" And been king of that nation his own kin to help;
" The least bairn of his blood a barons peer had been.

" Then Conscience like a coward counselled him thence,
" To leave his lordship for a little silver,
" The richest realm the clouds hang over.

" It becometh a king who keepeth his realm
" To give MEED to men who humbly serve him,
" To aliens, to all men, to honour them with gifts,
" MEED maketh him loved, MEED maketh him a man;
" Emperors, earls, all manner of lords,
" By MEED get yeomen to run and ride;
" The Pope and his prelates take gifts and MEED,
" Give MEED to men to uphold their laws;
" Servants for their service take MEED of their masters;
" Beggars for their prayers get MEED that they pray for;
" Minstrels for their mirth ask men for MEED;
" The king MEEDETH his men to keep peace in his land;
" Men that teach children crave of them MEED;
" Priests that preach and teach the people

" Ask MEED and mass-pence and their food also;
" Men of all crafts crave MEED for their 'prentices;
" Merchants and MEED go the road together,
" No wight I ween without MEED can live."

Saith the king to Conscience, " By Christ, methinketh,
" Meed is right worthy to have the mastery."

" Nay," quoth Conscience, " clerks know the truth,
" That Meed is evermore maintainer of Guile;
" There are two manner of MEEDS, my lord;
" One is given by Gods grace in the bliss of heaven
" To them that well work while they be here,
" The prophet preached of it and in the Psalter put it;
**Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle?**
" Take no Meed, my lord, of men that be true,
" Love them, believe them, for our Lords love in heaven;
" Gods Meed and Gods mercy therewith shalt thou win.

" But there is Meed and Wage and both men think
" Desert for a deed, open or secretly,
" Meed many a time is given before the deed,
" And that is neither right nor reason and no nations law
" For man to take wage save he deserves it.
" The man is overbold or else he is not true,
" That before work is done is paid or pay asketh.
" Harlots and whores, and false physicians,
" They ask their hire-money ere they have deserved it.
" The guileful give before and good men after,
" When the deed is done and the day ended.
" That is no Meed but wage a due debt for the doing,
" And if it be not paid the payer is to blame,
" As in the Book that bids none should withhold
" The hirelings hire until the morning:
**The work of thine hired man shall not dwell with thee till the morrow-tide.**

" Priests and parsons that would please men
" That take Meed and money for masses that they sing:
**There they have their reward.**

" What labourers and low men take from their masters
" Is no manner of Meed, it is measurable hire.

" In merchandise is no Meed, I well avow it,
" It is an open change, one pennyworth for another,
" And though the king of his courtesy, or Kaiser or Pope,
" Give men land or lordship, or other large gifts,
" To their leal liege subjects; love is the reason,
" And if the leal liege men be unloyal after,
" Then may King and Kaiser and the crownèd Pope
" Disavow that they did and others endow with it,
" And take it away anon; never more after
" May the men nor their heirs be bold to claim
" What King or Kaiser gave them in property or rent.

" God gave Solomon grace upon earth,
" Riches and reason, while he lived rightly,
" And as soon as God saw he wrought not His will,
" He robbed him of his riches and of his right mind,
" And let him live in unbelief. I think he be in hell.

" So God giveth nothing but with, *If thou dost well*,
" And King and Pope may give and grant
" And take it again from them that do ill,
" Whoso readeth Kings may read of MEED.
" She brought Absalom to hang on the tree,
" And since King Saul saved a king for MEED
" Against Gods orders; God took such vengeance
" That Saul for that sin and his sons died.
" God sent to Saul by Samuel the prophet
" That Agag of Amalek and all his liege people
" Should die for a deed their fathers had done:

" 'Therefore,' said Samuel, 'God himself biddeth thee
" 'Be obedient and ready his bidding to do,
" 'Wend with thy host women to kill,
" 'Children and churls, chop them to death;
" 'Look thou kill the king, covet not his goods,
" 'For millions of money; murder them each,
" 'Children and cattle burn all to ashes.'

" And for he killed not as God himself bad
" Coveted fair cattle, and killed not his beasts,
" God sent to say that Saul should die
" And all his seed for that sin shamefully end.
" Such mischief MEED brought on the king,
" God hated him ever and his heirs after him.

" The end of this story I care not to show;
" For fear I offend no end will I make;
" For so goes the world with them that have power
" If a man tell them truths he the sooner is blamed.

" Right as Agag had it shall happen to—some;
" Samuel shall slay him, Saul shall be blamed,
" David be diademed and defy them all,
" And one Christian king shall keep us his people,
" MEED shall no more be master on earth,
" But Love and Lowliness and Loyalty together.

" And he that trespasseth against the Truth,
" Loyalty shall teach him law or lose his life.

" And no sergeant wear silk for service that he doth,
" Nor fur on his cloak for pleading at the Bar.
" MEED paid by misdoers so rich men maketh
" That Law is waxed a proud lord and Loyalty is poor;
" Unkindness is in power, Kindness is banished,

"But human love shall yet come, and Conscience with him,
"And make lawyers labourers; such love shall arise;

"And such peace among the people and such perfect truth
"That Jews shall wax glad and ween indeed
"Their King be come from Heaven,
"Moses or the Messiah, (men be so true)
"And all that wear daggers, or bright swords or lances
"Axes and hatchets, and any other weapon,
"Shall be doomed to the death unless he do smithy it
"To scythe or sickle, share or coulter:
**And they shall beat together their swords into shares and their spears into scythes.**

"Each man shall play with a plough, pickaxe or spade,
"Shall spin or spread dung, or spoil his life with sloth;
"Priests and parsons shall hunt—their masses,
"Their psalters and their Seven Psalms, and pray for sinful men.
"If any of them use hawking or hunting,
"He shall lose his livelihood, perchance his life;
"Neither king nor constable, knight nor mayor,
"Shall trouble the people, nor summon them to court,
"Nor put them on a jury-list to make them take an oath,
"But as a deed is done it shall be judged,
"Mercy or no mercy.

"Kings court, commons courts, consistory and chapter,
"All shall be one court, and one judge—Justice;
"His name is tidy True-tongue, he never harmed me yet;
"Battles shall be none, nor none wear an edge-tool,
"And if a smith smithy one it shall smite him to death.
**Then shall not rear folk against folk a sword.**

*And see this good fortune fall* *men shall find worse fortune,*
*Six suns and a ship be seen,* *and half a sheaf of arrows,*
*And mid-moon shall make* *Jews to be converted,*
*And Saracens shall see and sing* *Glory to God in the highest,*
*And on Mahomet and Meed* *mishap shall come.*

**Better is a good name than many riches.**

As wroth as the wind was Meed at that,
" See what Solomon saith, in the Book of Wisdom,
" They that give gifts win the victory,
" And have much honour withal."

" I believe thee, lady, thy text is true,
" Thou art like the lady that a verse read
" *Try all things* —that pleased her heart,—
" The leaf ended at those words,
" Had she looked on the left and turned the leaf over,
" She would have found: *Hold fast to that which is true.*
" So he that readeth Wisdom shall find a text of woe,
" A full sad text to them that take this MEED.
" There was no cunning clerk to turn your leaf for you,

**He that giveth gifts winneth the victory**
**And hath much honour withal, but he taketh away the soul of him that receiveth them.**

" Worship he winneth who will give MEED,
" But the soul that taketh the gift by that gift is *bound*."

# THE VISION OF REASON
# CONSCIENCE AND THE KING

# THE VISION OF REASON

"CEASE," quoth the king, "I suffer it no longer,
"Ye shall be friends and serve me both of you;
"Kiss her, Conscience, I bid thee kiss her."

"Nay, by Christ," says he, "congee me for ever,
"Save Reason bid me I would rather die."

"Then," quoth the king, "haste thee and ride,
"And fetch me Reason and bid him come
"And he shall rule my realm and take account of thee,
"Of thee, Conscience, so Christ help me,
"How thou leadest my people, learned and lowly."

"I am glad of that covenant," said Conscience, "ifaith,"
And rode forth to Reason and rounded in his ear.

"I am ready," says Reason, "Rest thou a while,"
And called Cato his man, courteous of speech,
And *Tommy True-Tongue- Tell-me-no-Tales-*
*Nor-merry-lies- I-never-loved-them.*
"Set my saddle on *Suffer-till-I-see-my-time,*
"Fasten it well with *Wise-word* girths
"And hang the heavy bridle on to hold his head low,
"He will wince and kick ere he comes to the Court."

Then Conscience on his way set forth to ride,
And Reason with him whispering together,
"What a Queen Meed is, among rich and poor."

One Waryn Wisdom and his mate Wily-man
Followed them fast, which had to do

With Exchequer, chancery, and discharges of debts;
And rode fast, that Reason should counsel them well
And save them, for silver, from shame and from harm.

"Here come they," quoth Conscience, "slaves of covetise,
"Ride on, Sir Reason, and reck not of either
"Where wrath is and wrangling, there will they bide,
"Where love is and loyalty, their hearts are not.

Sorrow and cursedness is in the ways of them.

"They give of their goods, not a goose wing,
The dread of God is not before their eyes.

"They would do more for a dozen chickens,
"Or a dozen capons, or a seam of oats,
"Than for love of our Lord or all his dear Saints;
"Let them ride on, Reason, —rich folks—by themselves,
"I, Conscience, know them not, nay, nor doth Christ."

On rode Reason by the strait high gate,
Conscience guiding, till they came to the king.

Courteously the king met him and set him on a bench
Between himself and the Prince and talked long together.

Then came Peace to Parliament and put forth a bill:
"Wrong has taken my wife against my will,
"He has ravished Rose, Reginalds love,
"And Margarets maidenhead —when he met her late;
"My geese and pigs his fellows fetch,
"I dare not for dread of him fight nor chide;
"Borrowed my horse of me, brought him home never,

" And never a farthing, for all I cared plead;
" To S. Giles fair I dare not take money,
" He watcheth me well when I take silver with me,
" Which way I go to rifle and rob me;
" He maintaineth his men to murder my labourers,
" He forestalleth my goods and fighteth when I sell;
" He breaketh up my barn door and carrieth off my wheat,
" And giveth me a *tally* for ten quarters of oats,
" Me and mine he threateneth, lieth with my maid,
" Nor am I strong enough even to look on him."

*The king knew he said truth, Conscience told him,*
*Wrong was a wicked wretch and wrought much sorrow.*

Then was Wrong afeard, begged Wisdom make his peace,
Offered him pence: " Had I the kings love
" I would not reck if Peace railed for ever."
Then Wisdom and Waryn warned Wrong wisely,
" He that worketh by lust oft maketh wrath.
" I say it of thee thou shalt it well find
" If Meed will not help thee thy harm is sure,
" Thy life and thy land lie in her grace."
Then vowed Wrong to Wisdom full eagerly
To make peace with his pence, and paid " handy dandy."

Wisdom and Wit then went together,
And took Meed with them mercy to win.

Peace put his head forth, his scalp all bloody;
" Guiltless, God wot, gat I this scathe,
" Conscience knoweth it and the true commons."

But Wisdom and Wit went their ways
To win the king with bribes.

The king swore, by Christ, and by his crown,
Wrong for his evil deeds should suffer woe,

Commanded the constable to cast him in irons;
"Let him not see his feet for this seven year."

"God wot," saith Wisdom, "this is not the best way,
"If he will make amends let him have bail,
"And he shall give sureties and buy him his remedy,
"Amend what is mis-done and evermore be better."

Wit agreed: "Better is a remedy
"Than for ill to be beaten, and remedy no better."

Then Meed bethought her and begged for him mercy,
Proferred Peace a present all of pure gold:
"Take this, man, from me, to heal thy hurt,
"And I will wager Wrong shall do so no more."

Then Peace pitifully prayed to the king
To have mercy on the man that had so often wronged him:
"He hath paid me well, and—I forgive him,
"So that the king assent, I can no more say,
"Meed hath made amends, I ask no more."

"Nay," quoth the king, "Christ help me,
"Wrong goeth not so away, I will learn more of this;
"If he slip lightly off then will he laugh at me,
"And be the bolder to beat my servants;
"If Reason hath not pity he shall stay in my stocks
"As long as he liveth, till lowliness be bail."

Some men counselled Reason: "Have thou pity,
"Advise the king, advise Conscience,
"To let Meed go bail for Wrong."

"Counsel me no pity," says Reason,
"Till lords and ladies love the truth,

" Till they hate the loose word to hear it or speak it,
" Till the harlots kirtle be hidden away,
" Till children be cherished with the stroke of the rod,
" Till holiness of the wicked be taken at its worth,
" Till the clergy be covetous to clothe the poor,
" Till the rambling monks be kept to their cloister,
" Till preachers preaching be proved by their lives,
" Till the kings Council be the profit of the people,
" Till bishops horses be sold for houses,
" Their hawks and their hounds to help Gods poor,
" Till men go on pilgrimage to where the sick lie,
" In prisons and in humble cots;
" And if men go a pilgriming, save where I send them,
To Rome or Spain let them stay there for ever.

" Till Rome-runners carry no silver over sea,
" Graven or ungraven, for the robber Pope of France,
" On forfeiture of it if it be found at Dover,
" (Saving it be merchant, or messenger with letters,
" Or appointed priests returning to the Pope.)

" By the rood of Christ no pity will I have
" While Meed is mistress in this Council hall;
" If I were crownèd king to keep a realm
" Never should Wrong go unpunished,
" Nor get my mercy by bribes, God save my soul,
" No, not unless penitence went with the fine.
" The man EVIL shall ever meet the man PUNISHMENT
" The man GOOD shall ever meet REWARD.

" If thou, king, wilt do this, I wager my hands
" Lawyers shall turn labourers, and lead the dung a-field,
" And Love shall be the leader in thy land."

I saw Meed in the Council hall wink at the lawyers,
And they laughed and went
to her, and many left Reason.

All the righteous knew that Reason spoke truth,
And Kind-Wit and Conscience courteously thanked him,
And rich and poor loved him.

"We see well," they said, "by thy words, Sir Reason,
"Meekness is master of Meed at the last."

Love made light of Meed, Loyalty made lighter,
And they cried to Conscience —the king might well hear it—
"If a man take Meed to wife for her wealth and her goods
"Cut off my nose if he be not cuckolded."

Meed mourned then and her countenance was sad,
For the commons called her "quaint, common whore."

A juror and a summoner followed her fast,
And a sheriffs clerk cursed before the company:
"Full oft have I helped you at the Bar,
"And yet ye never gave me the worth of a rush."

Neither Wisdom nor Witty his mate
Could frame a word to withsay Reason;
They stared and studied and stood like cows.

The king agreed, by Christ, to Reasons cunning,
And rehearsed all that Reason had rightfully shown:
"But, by my head, 'tis hard to bring things to this,
"All my liege people to lead to honesty."

"By him that stretched on the Rood," quoth Reason,
"If I rule not thy realm thus rend out my ribs;
"If so be obedience is at one with me,
"And bring all men to bow to me amending the kingdom,
"Without fines, without murders, without bitter wounds."

"I would it were well," quoth the king, "the world over;
"Therefore, Reason, indeed thou shalt not ride hence,
"But be my chief chancellor in Exchequer and in Parliament,
"And Conscience Justice in all my courts."

"I assent if thou, king, wilt hear causes too.
"*Hear the other side.* Among aldermen and commoners
"No sufferance of wrong shall seal your secret letters,
"Nor shall there be stay of proceedings.
"Then I wager my life that Love will lend thee silver
"To pay thy wages and help to win thee gold
"More than all thy merchants, or thy mitred bishops,
"Or Lombards of Italy, that live by Jews usury."

The king commanded Conscience to congee his officers
And take those whom Reason loved, and with that I woke.

# THE WRITERS LIFE

# THE WRITERS LIFE

THUS I woke, God wot, where I dwelt in Cornhill.
(Kit my wife and I,) dressed like a loller,
And among the London lollers little was I set by,
And among the hermits (trust me for that),
For I made verses on them as my wit taught me.

Once when I had my health, in hot harvest time,
And my limbs to labour with, and loved good fare,
And nothing in life to do, but drink and sleep,
In health of body and mind,
I came on Conscience, and Reason met me,
He met and questioned me, and my memory roamed back,
And Reason reproved me.

"Canst thou serve as a priest or sing in church?
"Make a haycock in the field or pitch the hay?
"Canst mow or stock or bind the sheaves?
"Canst reap or guide the reapers? Canst rise early?
"Canst blow the horn, and keep the kine together,
"Lie out o' nights, and save my corn from thieves?

"Make shoes or clothes, or herd the sheep?
"Trim hedge, use harrow, or drive the swine and geese,
"Or do any other work that the people need
"To win some living for them that be bedridden?"

"Nay," said I, "God help me,
"I am too weak to work with sickle or with scythe.
"I am too long, believe me, to stoop low down,
"Or to last for any time as a true working man."

"Then hast thou lands to live by or rich lineage
"That findeth thee thy food? An idle man thou seemest;
"Thou art a spender and canst spend; thou art a spill-time,
"Or thou beggest thy living at mens buttery hatches;
"Thou art a Friday-beggar, a feast-day beggar in the churches;
"A lollers life is thine, little to be praised.
"Righteousness rewardeth men as they deserve.
**Thou shalt yield to each man after his works.**
"Thou art maybe broken in body or limb,
"Maimed maybe through mishap, therefore art thou excused?"

"When I was young," quoth I, "many a year ago,
"My father and my friends set me to school
"Till I knew throughly what Holy Scripture said,
"What is best for the body, what is safest for the soul.
"Yet never did I find since my friends died
"A life that pleased me save in these long clothes,
"If I must live by labour and earn my living
"I must needs labour at the work I learned.
**Each man in what calling he is called there dwell he.**

"I live *in* London and I live *on* London,
"The tools I labour with, to get my living by,
"Are the Lords Prayer, my Primer, my Dirges and my Vespers,
"And sometimes my Psalter and the Seven Psalms;
"I sing masses for the souls of those that give me help,
"And they that find me food welcome me when I come,
"Man or woman, once a month, into their houses;
"No bag have I nor bottle, only my belly.

"Moreover, my lord Reason, men should, methinks,
"Constrain no cleric to do common work,

" The tonsured clerk, a man of understanding,
" Should neither sweat nor toil, nor swear at inquests,
" Nor fight in the van of battle, nor hurt his foe.
Render not evil for evil.
" They be the heirs of heaven, all that are ordained,
" And in choir and church Christs own ministers.
The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance.
" Clerks it becometh for to serve Christ,
" And for folk unordained to cart and work,
" And no clerk should be tonsured save he be the son
" Of frankleyns and free men and of wedded folk;
" Bondmen and bastards and beggars children,
" *These* are the sons of labour, *these* are to serve lords,
" To serve God and the good as their station asketh.

" But since bondmens sons are made into bishops,
" And bastard bairns are made archdeacons,
" And soap-makers and their sons are knights for silvers sake,
" And lords sons be their labourers and have mortgaged their rents
" And to support this realm have ridden against our foes
" To comfort the Commons and honour the king,
" And monks and nuns that should support the poor
" Have made their own kin knights and paid the fees for it,
" Popes and patrons refuse poor gentle blood,
" And take the sons of Mammon to keep the Sanctuary;
' Holiness of life and Love have long to us been strangers,
" And will be till these things wear out, or they be somehow changed.

" Therefore, rebuke me not, Reason, I pray thee,
" For in my conscience I know what Christ would have me do.
" Prayers of a perfect man and his discreet penance,
" These be the dearest work that our Lord loveth."

Quoth Conscience, "By Christ, I see not where this tendeth,
"But to beg your life in cities is not the perfect life,
"Save you be in obedience to Prior or to Minster."

"That's truth," said I, "I do acknowledge it,
"That I have lost my time, mis-spent my time,
"And yet I hope that even as one who oft hath bought and sold
"And always lost and lost and at the last hath happened
"To buy him such a bargain that he is better for ever
"And all his loss is at the last only as a leaf,
"Such a winning is his, under Gods grace,
The kingdom of heaven is like treasure . . . etcetera,
A woman who found a piece of silver . . . etcetera,
"Even so hope I to have of Him that is Almighty
"A gobbet of His grace; and then begin a time
"That shall turn to profit all the days of my life."

"I counsel thee," quoth Reason, "hurry to begin
"The life that is commendable and dear to the soul;"
"*Aye, and continue in it,*" quoth Conscience.

So to the kirk I went to honour my Lord;
Before the Cross upon my knees I knocked my breast,
Sighing for my sins, saying my prayer,
Weeping and wailing till again I was asleep.

# THE VISION OF REASONS SERMON

PREACHED TO THE FIELD FULL OF FOLK, AND OF THE SHRIVING OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

# THE VISION OF REASONS SERMON

THE king and his knights to the kirk went,
To hear the days mattins and the mass after.
Then I waked from my slumber and woe it was to me
That I had not slept sounder and seen the more,
But ere I fared a furlong faintness took me;
I could go no foot further for want of sleep,
And sat me softly down, and said my creed,
Babbled my prayers, they brought me sleep.

Then I saw much more than I have told before,
I saw the FIELD FULL OF FOLK.
Reason arrayed himself and preached to all the kingdom,
And held a cross before the king and thus began:

He prayed the people have pity on themselves.
He proved these Pestilences were for pure sin.
The South-West hurricane on Saturday even,
Was openly for pride, for nothing else,
Pear trees, plum trees, puffed to earth,
An example, ye men, ye should live better lives.
Beeches and broad oaks blown to the ground,
Their roots up-turned in token of dread,
That deadly sin at Doomsday shall ruin us all.

He bade wasters go work at what they best knew,
And with some kind of craft earn what they wasted now.

He prayed Parnel the gay put by her broidered robe,
And keep it in her coffer to serve her at her need.

Tom Stowe he told to take two sticks,
And bring home Felice from the scolding-stool.

Watt he warned his wife was in the wrong,
Her bonnet cost a half-mark, his hood a groat.

Batt he bad go and cut a bough or two,
And beat Betty with it if she would not work.

Merchants he charged to chasten their children
And let no money pamper them while they be young,
And not to cocker them for any plague that comes.
"My sire told me and my dame
"That the dearer the child is the more he must learn
"Solomon that wrote Wisdom said the same:
**Qui parcit virgae odit filium.**
"The English of this Latin is, if any one would know it,
"Spare the switch, spill the son."

And then he prayed prelates: "What ye preach, do,
"Live as ye teach us, we shall trust you the better."

Then he bade Religion keep to her Rule,
"Lest the king and the commons take your wealth
"And be stewards in your places till ye be better governed."

"Gregory that great clerk wrote the Rule down—
"As fishes in drought die for water,
"Even so Religion rotteth and starveth
"When out of cloister it coveteth to dwell:
"For if there be heaven on earth, or ease to any soul,
"It is in the cloister or the school.
"To the cloister man cometh not to chide nor fight,

" All is book and obedience, reading and learning;
" In the school the clerk is scorned if he will not learn;
" Great love and liking there; each loveth other.

" But now is Religion a rider, a roamer through the streets,
" A leader at the love-day, a buyer of the land,
" Pricking on a palfrey from manor to manor,
" A heap of hounds at his back as tho he were a lord,
" And if his servant kneel not when he brings his cup,
" He loureth on him asking who taught him courtesy.
" Badly have lords done to give their heirs lands
" Away to the Orders that have no pity;
" Money rains upon their altars.
" There where such parsons be living at ease
" They have no pity on the poor; that is their 'charity.'
" Ye hold you as lords; your lands are too broad,
" But there shall come a king and he shall shrive you all
" And beat you as the Bible saith for breaking of your Rule.
" He shall mend you monks you canons and you nuns,
" And put you to your penance and make you walk in old paths
" And barons and their sons shall blame and reprove you.

**These in chariots and these in horses . . . they be bound and fell down.**

" Friars in their begging shall find the key
" To Constantines coffers in which is the money
" That Gregorys godchildren wickedly wasted.
" For the Abbot of Abingdon and his niece the abbess
" Shall be knocked on their crowns and the wound shall be mortal.
" But ere that king come, so chronicles tell me,
" The church and the clergy shall be clothed new."

Then he counselled the king the commons to love
" Where treason is not they are thy treasure,"

"And treacle in thy need.
"Rich and commons should agree in all kind of truth.
"Let no manner of counsel nor covetise part you,
"But in sense and good will guard ye your trust.
"In heaven on high was such a holy commonweal
"Till liar Lucifer believed himself
"Worthier and wittier than his Master was.

"Hold ye then in unity and he who would teach you other
"Is cause of all that cumbers and confounds a realm."

Then he prayed the pope have pity on the church,
And grant no grace till good love comes
Among all kings over their Christian peoples;
"And all confessors that shrive any king
"Give Peace as your penance and perpetual pardon
"For all manner deeds and for each to love others.

"And ye that seek S. James, and saints of Rome,
"Seek ye Saint Truth, for he shall save you all,
Who with the Father and the Son . . .
"Fair befall them that follow my sermon,"
So ended Reason.

(*Here begin the Repentance and Shriving of the Seven Deadly Sins*)

Then ran Repentance and repeated Reasons words
And made me, William, weep.

## (PRIDE OF WOMAN)

Parnel proud-hearted lay flat upon the earth,
Long she lay ere she looked "O God, have mercy."
Promised to Him that made us all
She would unsew her shift and set a hair shirt there,
To tame her flesh so fierce to sin:

"Pride shall not draw me, I will hold me low,
"I will let me be slandered, that did I never;
"Now I will meek me, mercy beseeching;
"All this till now have I hated in my heart."

"Repent thee," quoth Repentance, "as Reason hath taught thee,
"Shrive thee and sharply and shake off thy pride."

(PRIDE OF MAN)

"I, Pride, patiently, ask for penance,
"First to father and mother was I inobedient,
"Unabashed to offend God and the good,
"Inobedient to the Church and to them that serve her,
"I judged her for her vices; I urged on others,
"With word and wit the churchmens evil works to show,
"Scorning them and others when I saw my time
"That simple folk should think me witty and wise.
"Proud of my apparel; appearing among men
"Other than I was in mind or in wealth;
"Willing men to think me, for the goods I had,
"Rich and eloquent, righteous in my life;
"A boaster, a braggart, I, full of bold oaths,
"Vaunting my vainglory in face of all reproof;
"Singular, alone, for none was like to me;
"Some time in one faith, some time in another,
"Wishing men should think *my* work was the best,
"*My* craft the cleverest, *my* riding the strongest,
"*My* strength the stiffest, *my* face the handsomest,
"*My* love the sweetest, *my* crimes the boldest,
"Proud of my fair features, proud of my shrill song.

"What I gave for Gods love I told my gossips all about it
"For them to think me holy, holy and free of alms;

" None so bold a beggar to ask what I craved;
" A teller of tales in inns and at street corners;
" Things that none had thought on I swore I saw them done;
" Them that sat beside me I took to witness:
" ' Lo, if ye believe me not or if ye ween I lie
" ' Ask him, ask her, for they can tell you all.'
" What *I* suffered, what *I* saw, what *I* had, what *I* knew,
" What *I* once could do, what kin *I* came of,
" I would men knew it all if it but helped my pride
" To be praised among the people."

**If I pleased men I could not be Christs servant, No man can serve two masters.**

" Now God of his goodness give thee grace to amend,"
Quoth Repentance.

## (LECHERY)

Then said Lechery, " Alas, O our Lady,
" Lady, to thy dear Son, pray for me now;
" To have pity on me lustful of his pure mercy and grace;
" I will drink with the duck and dine but once on Saturday.
" I am guilty in spirit, I am guilty in body,
" In words, in dress, in watching for eyes.
" Every maid I met I made her a sin-sign,
" Some would I kiss and handle till our lust was one;
" On fast days, on Fridays, on feast-day vigils,
" In Lent and out of Lent, all times were one to me;
" Such work with me and them was never out of season.
" Merry tales we had of lust and paramours,
" Clever songs we made; we sent out bawds,
" To win with guile women to my will.
" Some I won by sorcery, some I won by strength;
" I took the loveliest and never loved them after.
" When I was old and hoar and had lost my nature
" Then would I laugh at lecherous tales.
" Now, Lord, of thy grace, on Lechers have mercy."

# The Vision of the Seven Sins

## (ENVY)

Envy with heavy heart asked for his shrift,
" My fault," says he, cursing all his enemies.
His clothes were of cursing and of keen words;
He was pale as a stone; in a palsy he seemed,
And like a leek that had lain long in the sun
So looked he with long cheeks foully louring.
His body was all swollen with wrath; he bit his lips,
And went wringing his fists; he would wreak vengeance
With word or deed when his time he saw.
Every word he threw was of an adders tongue;
Of chiding and of challenging all his living was;
Backbiting and calumny and bearing of false witness,
This was his courtesy where'er he showed his face.

" I would be shriven," quoth this shrew, " if for shame I durst.
" I would be gladder, by God, if Gilbert had a hurt
" Than if I this week had won a wey of Essex cheese.
" I have a neighbour near me, I have envied him often,
" Blamed him behind his back, to bring slander on him,
" Lied to lords about him, to make him lose his silver,
" Made his friends his foes, through my false tongue;
" His weal and his good chances grieve me full sore,
" Between him and his servants have I made strife,
" His life and his limbs were lost through my speech.

" When at market I meet him I most hate,
" I hail him kindly as I his friend were;
" I dare do no other, he is stronger than I.
" Had I mastery and might God knows what I would do.

" When I come to the kirk and should kneel to the Rood,
" And pray for the people as the priest preacheth,

hen I cry on my knees: ‘Christ give them sorrow,
“ ‘ That took away my bowl and my torn sheet.’

“ Then from the altar I turn my eyes and see—
“ Heyne hath a new coat, and his wife another,
“ I wish it were mine and all the piece it came from.

“ When men lose I laugh, my heart loveth that,
“ When they win I weep, and wail to think of it,
“ I deem that they do ill when I do far worse,
“ And if any rebuke me I hate him deadly evermore.
“ I would that each man were my servant.
“ If one hath more than I that angrieth me sore,
“ Thus I live loveless like a vicious dog,
“ And all my body swelleth so bitter is my gall.

“ I blame men behind them and pray for their mischance;
“ What I hear from Will, I tell it to Watkin,
“ All I know from Watkin, Will hears it after.
“ I make foes of friends through a false and fickle tongue;
“ I burn myself within me as with a tailors shears.
“ Through my power of talk, through many a trick,
“ I take my vengeance and curse my fellow-Christians
“ Against Christs counsel.

“ And when I cannot master them I take such melancholy,
“ That I catch cramp, and sometimes spasms,
“ Ague or fever, till I forget
“ The leechcraft of our Lord and believe in the wizards.
“ No clerk can help me no, nor Christ,
“ Like the cobbler of South-wark or Dame Em of Shoreditch.
“ God and His words give me no help
“ Like a chance charm I have; *that* chiefly cured me.

"For many a year I could not eat
as a man should,
"For envy and ill-will
be hard things to digest;
"No sugar nor sweet thing
may assuage my swelling,
"Nor any remedy on earth
drive it from my heart,
"No, neither shrift nor shame,
save one should scrape my maw."

"Yes, there is remedy," quoth Repentance,
and gave him counsel of the best,
"Sorrow for sin
is salvation of soul."

"I *am* sorry," says he,
"seldom am I not;
"That makes me meagre,
for I cannot avenge me.

"I am a broker of backbiting,
I blame mens wares.
"When he sold and I did not
then was I ready
"To lie and to glower
and blame my neighbours,
"Their works and their words,
wherever I was.
"Now it grieves me in my mind
that ever I did so;
"Ere I my life leave, O Lord,
grant me of thy love,
"Grant me, good Lord,
grace of amendment."

(WRATH)

Now awoke Wrath
with his two white eyes,
With snivelling nose,
and bitten lips.
"I am Wrath," quoth he,
"I will gladly smite
"With stone or staff
or steal upon my enemy,
"Bethinking me of sleights
to slay them slyly,
"Though I sat here seven years
I could not well tell
"The harm I have done
with hand and tongue,
"Impatient of all penances,
complaining of God,
"And grumbling at His sending
when aught grieved me,

metimes in summer, and sometimes in harvest,
If weather were not as I wished then I blamed God.

" Mid all kinds of men my dwelling is,
" With gentle and simple that love to hear harm.

" I am Wrath. Once I was a Friar,
" Gardener in the convent, grafting slips;
" I grafted lies on preachers and visitors,
" And the lies bare leaves and blossomed abroad,
" And entered my ladys bower to hear confessions.
" Now comes the fruit.— Men will go shrive them
" To preachers and visitors and not to their parsons,
" Parsons soon see these share their shrift-money,
" Then parsons preach and defame the Friars,
" And Friars blame parsons; all men know it.
" I, Wrath, walk mid all, I teach them from the book of Wrath

" Both vaunt their spiritual power, their spiritual power is Wrath,
" Each contemns the other, and all come to poverty,
" Or else ride about rich, and their spiritual power is mine.

" I, Wrath, never rest from following these wicked.

" I have an aunt, a Nun, another an Abbess,
" They would sooner faint or die than suffer any penance.
" I was cook in their kitchen, I served the convent,
" Many months with them, and many with the monks.
" Broth for the prioress I made and for other poor ladies,
" Broth and soup made out of chatter. Thus it went.
" ' Sister Joan was a bastard.
" ' Sister Clarice a knights daughter, her father a cuckold;

" ' Sister Pernell a priests wench, not fit to be prioress;
" ' She bore a child in cherry-time; all the chapter knew it,
" ' They challenged her with it at her election day.'

" I, Wrath, their pottage made all out of wicked words.

" ' Liar thou art," cries one, ' Liar, liar,' cries the other,
" Each hit the other under the cheekbone,
" Had they had knives, by Christ, each had killed the other.

" All ladies loathe me that love honourable ways.

" Among wives and widows I am wont to sit,
" High fenced in the high pews in church,
" The parson knoweth well how I hate Lettice;
" She took the Sacrament before me and she and I met and chid,
" Each called the other whore. Off with our clothes,
" Heads were bare, and cheeks bloody.

" Among the monks I might be but often I shun it,
" There be so many cruel men my doings to espy,
" The Prior, the sub-prior, and Father abbot,
" If there I tell my angry tales they meet and take me
" And make me fast on Fridays on bread and water.
" I am challenged in the chapter as though I were a child,
" Birched on the bare back-side and never a shirt between.

" I have no liking to live among the monks,
" They eat more fish than flesh; they drink feeble ale,
" And once when wine cometh and I sit and drink late
" I have a flux of foul words for five days after.
" All the wickedness I know of any in our convent
" I cough it up in our cloisters and all the world hears it."

"Repent ye," quoth Repentance,
"The counsel that thou knowest
"Nor drink delicate drink,
"Lest thy will and thy wit
"Be thou sober," says he,
And bad him pray to God
"and never more repeat
by thy look or by thy speech,
nor drink deep at all,
should turn to wrath.
and gave him absolution
to be his prospering help.

## (COVETOUSNESS OR AVARICE)

Then came Covetise,
So hungry and hollow
Beetle-browed, babber-lipped,
And, like a leather purse,
Below his chin
A hood upon his head,
A tawny cloak upon him,
All torn and rotten
But, if a louse could leap away,
So threadbare was the cloth of it.
him cannot I describe,
Sir Harveys self he looked;
with his bleared eyes,
his cheeks lolled down
and shivered with age.
and a lousy hat on top,
twelve winters old,
and full of creeping lice;
she had not been there

"I have been covetous," quoth this caitiff,
"I do acknowledge it,

"Once I served Sim At-stile,
"First I learnt to lie,
"Then to weigh false
"To Winchester and Weyhill
"With all kinds of merchandise
"But had not grace of Guile
"They had been unsold seven years,
and was his 'prentice bound,
a page or two of lies,
was my second lesson,
I went to the fair
as my master bad,
gone with me and my goods,
Gods my witness.

"Then I passed to the drapers,
"To draw the edges out
to learn my other lessons,
that the flannel might seem longer.

" Among the rich striped cloths I learned another lesson,
" Threaded them with pack-needles, fastened them together,
" Put them in a press, pinned them down therein,
" Till ten yards or twelve made out—thirteen.

" My wife was a weaver, woollen cloth she made,
" She spake to her spinners to spin it soft,
" But the pound-weight she paid by weighed a quarter more
" Than my own balance did, when I weighed fair.
" I used to buy her barley, she brewed it to sell,
" Penny ale and thick ale, she mixed it together,
" For labourers and poor folk. *It* lay by itself;
" The best ale in my bower, or in my bedchamber;
" Any man that boozed of that never bought other,
" Fourpence a gallon, and no good measure either
" When it was served in cups. In that my wife was cunning:
" Rose of the Small Shop was her true name,
" She has been a huckster these eleven winters.

" But now I swear, so may I thrive, this cheating I will stop,
" Nevermore will I weigh false, nor cheat in selling,
" But I will wend me to Walsingham, and my wife with me,
" And pray to Bromholm cross, to save me from my sins."

" Didst ever repent? didst never restitution make? "

" Yes, once I was in an inn, with a heap of travellers,
" I rose when they were sleeping, and rifled their packs."

" That was no restitution, that was a robbers theft;
" Thou hadst deserved hanging for that more than for all thy cheating else."

"I thought rifling *was* restitution," says he,
"I know no French i'faith,

"I never learned my book;
only from far Norfolk."

"Didst ever use usury,

in all thy lifetime?"

"Nay, saving in my youth,
"I weighed pence with a weight,
"And lent money on pledge,

with Lombards and Jews,

I pared the heaviest,
the pledge was worth more than the loan.

"I wrote me out agreements;
"I gat me more wealth

if the borrower failed his day,
than through merciful lending.

"I have lent to lords and ladies,
"I lent to folk that were willing to lose
"I had bankers letters
"I counted it right here,

and myself redeemed the pledge;

a bit from every coin.
and took my coin to Rome,
but there it was less."

"Didst ever lend to lords

in return for their protection?"

"Ay, I have lent to lords;
"I have made many a knight
"They gave me colours to wear,
"Never a pair of gloves

they never loved me after;
into mercer and draper,
thus they were *my* 'prentices,
did they pay me for the same."

"Hast thou pitied the poor,

who sometimes needs must borrow?"

"Ay, as much pity
"Would kill them an they catch them,

as pedlars have on cats,

for the sake of their skins."

"Art thou free among thy neighbours

with thy meat and drink?"

"I am held as courteous as a dog is in a kitchen;
"That is the name I have among them."

"God grant thee never his grace through all thy life,
"Save thou repent thee soon and use well thy goods.
"God grant thy sons after thee no joy of that thou winnest,
"And thine executors no profit in that thou leavest them;
"That which was won by wrong shall be spent by the wicked,
"For neither Pope nor Pardoner hath ever power
"To pardon thee thy sins, save thou make reparation."
The sin is not remitted save restitution be made.

"Ay, I have won my goods with false word and wit,
"I have gathered what I have with glosing and with guile;
"I mixed my merchandise, I made a fine array,
"But the best was outside the shop and the worst inside—
"There was wit in that.

"And if my neighbour had man or beast better at all than mine,
"I tried many a trick to get it for mine own,
"And, save I got it otherwise, at the last I stole it;
"I shook his purse out or I picked his locks.

"If I went to the plough, I pinched of his half-acre,
"A foot or a furrow of my neighbours land,
"If I reaped I would reach over, or bad them that reaped for me
"Seize with their sickles what I never sowed.

"In holy-days at church, when I heard mass,
"I had no will to weep my sins;
"Nay, I mourned my loss of goods, and not my bodys guilt.

"When I did deadly sin, I feared it not so much,
"As when I lent and thought it lost when payment was delayed.

"If I sent my servant to Bruges or Prussia-land,
"To do traffic with money and to make exchange,
"No man could comfort me, nor mass nor mattins,
"Nor penance done, nor paternoster prayed;
"My mind was on my goods, not on Gods grace.

**Where your treasure is there shall your heart be also.**

"In sooth," Repentance said, "I have pity on thy life,
"Were I a Friar, in good faith, for all the gold in earth,
"I would take no money of thine, nor rob me in goods of thine,
"Nor mend our church with gold of thine, nor take a dinners cost from thee;
"By my souls health I would not a penny pittance of thee
"For the best book in our House, tho the leaves were burnt gold;
"If I knew thee to be what thou sayest I would sooner starve.

**Better die than live ill.**

"I counsel any faithful Friar never to sit at board of thine,
"I would liever, by our Lord, live upon watercress
"Than have food and finding from a false mans fortune.

**When thou eatest rich food thou art anothers slave;**
**Feed on thine own loaf and be free.**

"Thou art unnatural; I cannot pardon thee.
"Make reparation, and reckon with them all.
"All that take of thy goods, God is my witness,
"Are bound at the High Judgment to help thee to restore.
"The priest that taketh tithe of thee, if he know thee what thou art,
"Shall share thy purgatory and help to pay thy debt.

"Never workman in this world shall thrive on thy winnings;
"Look in the Psalter:
For to thou desiredst truth.
"Then thou shall know fully what usury doth mean,
"And what the priests penance is who is proud of thine offerings;
"For a harlot of her body hire may more boldly pay church tithe
"And shall sooner come to heaven than an arrant usurer like thee,
"God be my witness."

Then that shrew waxed despairing and would have hanged himself,
Had not Repentance comforted him thus:
"Have mercy in thy thoughts, and in thy prayers pray for it,
"For Gods mercy is more than all His other works,
"And all this worlds wickedness, that man can work or think,
"Is no more to the mercy of God than is a spark in Thames.
"Thou hast not good enough in thee to buy thee a wastel cake,
"Saving by penitence, or work of thy two hands.
"The goods thou hast gotten began in falsehood,
"And long as thou livest on them thou payest not but borrowest more;
"And if thou know not to whom to make thy reparation,
"Take thy money to the Bishop, bid him use it for thy soul;
"He shall answer for thee at the High Judgment day,
"For thee—and many more."

## (GLUTTONY)

Now beginneth Gluttony to go to shrive him,
And fare to churchward his sins to show.

Forth he went upon his way fasting, on a Friday,
But Betty the brewster bad him good morrow,
And asked of him withal whitherward he went.

"I go to church," says he, "for to hear mass,
"And then will I be shriven, and I shall no more sin."

"Gossip," says she, "I have good ale; wilt taste it, Glutton?"

"What hast thou?" says he, "any hot spice?"

"Pepper and peony seeds," says she, "and a pound of garlic,
"And a farthings worth of fennel, for your fasting day."

Then in goes Glutton and great oaths welcomed him.

Cis the shoemaker sat on the bench,
Watt the gamekeeper and his wife—drunk;
Tom the tinker and two of his 'prentices,
Hick the hackneyman, Hogg the needler,
Clarice of Cock Lane and the parish clerk;
Parson Piers of Pray-to-God and Pernel the Flemish woman,
Daw the ditcher and a dozen more of them;
A fiddler, a ratter, and a Cheapside scavenger,
A ropemaker, a trooper, and Rose of the Small Shop,
A watchman and a hermit, and the Tyburn hangman;
Godfrey the garlic seller, Griffin the Welshman,
All early in the morning welcomed Glutton gladly
To try the new good ale.

Then cobbler Clement threw down his cloak,
And said it was for sale at the New Fair Change.
Hick the hackneyman threw down his hood,
And bad Bet the butcher be speaker on his side;
Two then were chosen the exchange to value—

He that had the hood should have somewhat with it.—
The two rose readily, and whispered together,
And went aside and valued the goods,
They could not in their conscience truly agree;
Till Robin the ropemaker was bidden to arise,
And named an umpire that quarrel should be none.
Hick the ostler took the cloak,
And Clement took Hicks hood and a cup of ale,
And held him satisfied; for if one should repent of it
Sir Glutton should be treated to a gallon of ale.

There was laughing and chattering, and, "Pass the cup round,"
Bargains and toasts and songs, and so they sat—till evensong,
And Glutton had gulped down a gallon and a gill.

He could neither step nor stand till he had his staff,
Then gan he walk like a blind singers dog,
Now to this side, now to that, and sometimes backward,
Like a man who lays lines to catch wild birds;
And when he drew to the doorstep, then his eyes grew dim,
He stumbled on the threshold and fell flat on the floor;
Then Cobbler Clement caught him by the waist
To lift him up on high and get him to his knees;
But Glutton was a heavy churl and groaned as he lifted him,
And coughed up his drink in Clements lap.

With all the trouble in the world his wife and his wench
Bore him home to his bed and laid him therein;
And after all this surfeit he had a sleeping fit;
All Saturday and Sunday slept till the sun went to rest.
Then waked he from his winking and wiped his eyes,
And the first word he threw was, "Where's the tankard?"

His wife and his conscience rebuked him for his sin,
He waxed ashamed, that shrew, and swiftly asked for shrift,
And to Repentance cried, "Have pity on me,
"Thou, Lord, that art on high and all lives didst shape,
"To thee, God, I, Glutton, confess me guilty,
"Guilty of trespass with my tongue, how oft I cannot tell,
"'By Gods soul, By Gods sides, So help me God Almighty,'
"When there was no need of oath.
"I have over eaten at supper-time sometimes at breakfast-time,
"More than my body might well digest;
"And then I, Glutton, cast it up ere I had walked a mile,
"And spoilt what might have well been spent upon the hungry.
"Over daintily on fasting days I have eaten and have drunken;
"Sitting so long at table, I slept and ate at once.
"Hereof, good God, grant me forgiveness
"Of all my vicious living all my life long."

Then gan Glutton weep and made great dole,
And vowed to fast: "Hungry and thirsty though I be,
"Never shall fish on Friday be eaten or swallowed
"Till Aunt Abstinence allows whom all my life I hated."

"This showing shrift," says Repentance, "shall be of merit to thee."

## (PARSON SLOTH)

Then came Sloth, beslabbered, with two slimy eyes,
"I must sit down," says he, "or I shall nap,
"I cannot stand or stoop, or kneel without a footstool,
"Once I am in bed, no bell-ringing can rouse me
"Till I am ripe for dinner."

He began with a belch and beat his breast in penitence
And stretched him out and yawned —and then he snored.

"What, wake, man, wake," cried Repentance, "and haste thee to shrift."

"Should I die, by this day, I dread me sore,
"I know not my paternoster, as the priest sings it,
"I know rhymes of Robin Hood and Randolph Earl of Chester,
"But of our Lord and of our Lady—none, not the shortest ever made.

"I have made forty vows and forgot them in the morning,
"Never penance have I done as the priest bade me,
"And never was I sorry for my sins.
"If I tell my beads (unless I be in wrath),
"My heart is two miles away from the words of my mouth;
"Each day am I busy, holy days and others,
"With idle tales at the ale, and idle tales in church.
"Gods passion and pain on that I think seldom.

"I never visited the weak or fettered men in prisons,
"I had liever hear loose talk at a cobblers merrymaking,
"Or laugh at lying tales, or slander my neighbour,
"Than all that ever they wrote, Matthew, Mark, or Luke or John.
"Vigils and fast days I can clean forget them all,
"I lie abed in Lent with my leman in my arms,
"Till mattins and mass be done. Then I go to the Friars
"If I hear the last word I hold myself satisfied.

"Save sickness makes me not twice in ten years
"Do I confession make, and then I tell not half my sins.

" I have been priest and parson for thirty winters past,
" But I cannot solfa or sing, or read a Latin life of saints;
" But I can find a hare, in a field or in a furrow,
" Better than construe the first Psalm or explain it to the parish.
" I can hold a friendly meeting, I can cast a shires accounts,
" But in mass book or Popes edict I cannot read a line.

" If I buy or borrow, unless the score be up against me,
" I forget it as soon as bought; and if a man ask me
" Six times or seven I deny it with oaths.
" Thus have I served true men ten hundred times.

" My servants wages go unpaid, it is sad on settling-day,
" When with wrath and wicked wish my workmen I pay.
" If a man do me service, or help me in my need,
" I am unkind when he is courteous, I cannot understand him.
" I have and always had the manners of a hawk,
" I am not lured with love; there must be meat under the thumb.

" The kindness my brother-Christian, showed me of old,
" I, Sloth, have forgotten it, ay, sixty times have I,
" By what I said and what I left unsaid.

" Many a time have I spoilt fish, flesh, and other food,
" Bread, ale, butter, milk and cheese,
" All wasted by my keeping them; and I have set my house a-fire.

" In my youth I ran about, I gave me not to service,

"And ever since have been a beggar, all for my foul sloth,
"O me, my barren, barren days."

"Repent thee," quoth Repentance, and with that Sloth swooned,
Till Wake the watchman threw water in his eyes
And flapped it on his face and said:
"Beware thee of Despair for he would betray thee,
"Say, 'I am sorry for my sin,' pray God for grace and beat thy breast;
"No guilt so great that His goodness is not greater."

Then sat Sloth up and signed him ever and again,
And vowed before God:
"(Save I be sick), "No Sunday shall go by
"To the dear church that I shall not early go
"Nor shall ale after dinner and hear mass and mattins;
"Till I have heard evensong: keep me thence,
by the Cross I swear it.

"Ay and I will pay again (if I the money have),
"All that I made wickedly since I had art to make it;
"And though my living fail yet I will not cease;
"Every man shall have his own, ere I go hence.
"And with the remnant, by the Chester Rood,
"Before I pilgrim it to Rome, I will seek—Saint Truth."

## THE PRAYER OF REPENTANCE FOR THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Then had Repentance pity and bad them all kneel:
"For all sinful souls I pray our Saviour,
"To mend you your misdeeds, to be merciful to all.
"God who of Thy goodness of old made the world,

" Making all out of nothing, and making man like Thee,
" And suffered man to do sin and brought sickness on us all—
" All for the best as I believe as the Book telleth—

**O blessed fault, O necessary sin of Adam,**

" For through that sin thy Son down to this earth was sent
" And became man, son of a maid, mankind to save,
" Thou that madest Thyself Thy Son like us in body and soul,

**I am in the Father and the Father in me and he that seeth me seeth my Father,**

" Thou that with thy Son in our flesh didst die,
" For mans sake on Good Friday and felt our sorrow,

**He led captivity captive,**

" When the sun for sorrow lost for a time his light,
" When most light is at midday; feeding our forefathers
" At midday mealtime of thy saints with thy fresh blood,

**The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.**

" The light that leapt from out thee blinded Lucifer,
" And brought thy blessed from his power into the bliss of heaven;
" Thou that on the third day after in our mortal flesh didst go
" Where the sinner Mary saw thee, before Mary thy mother,
" For comfort of the sinful thou sufferedst her to see thee first:

**I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance,**

" All that Mark hath written, Matthew, Luke and John
" Of thy doughtiest deeds all was done by thee as man;

**The Word was made flesh,**

" Thou to whom therefore we may more surely pray,
" Thou that wert first our Father
" And above all our Saviour: and in thy flesh our Brother,
" Thou that hast told us BE MERCIFUL TO US.
" For our deeds done ill, when we be sorry
if we acknowledge them and cry,

" Damned we shall be never:
**I will not remember his iniquities any more,**
" Because of this Thy mercy, for the love of Mary Thy mother,

" Have pity on these wicked men
" That ever they have angered thee, that repent them sore
Then seized Hope a horn in word, or thought, or deed."
*Lord - thou - shalt - turn - and - quicken-us,*
And blew it to the sound of **Blessed are they whose iniquity is forgiven,**
And all the saints in heaven together sang the hymn,
A thousand men crowded and cried
For grace to go to Truth,— to Christ and his dear mother
God grant they may.

# THE VISION OF
# THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH
## AND OF THE
# COMING OF PIERS PLOWMAN

# THE VISION OF THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

BUT no wight was so wise that knew the way to Truth;
They blustered forth like beasts, over the valleys and the hills;
Long was the way and late when they met a palmer,
In pilgrims dress apparelled; he had a staff in hand,
Bound with broad list like bindweed twisted round it,
A bowl and bag, he bare at his side,
And on his hat a hundred flasks of lead,
Many a cross from Sinai, scallop-shells of Spain,
Cross-keys from Rome, and the portraiture of Christ,
Signs of his pilgrimage, that men might know his saints.

This folk required of him whence he had come;

"From Sinai," says he, "and from our Lords Sepulchre,
"Bethlehem, Babylon, Alexandria, Armenia, and Damascus;
"Ye may see by my signs, that be upon my hat
"Good saints have I sought for my souls health,
"Walking full wide in wet and dry."

"Knowest thou a holy saint that men call TRUTH?
"Canst thou tell us the way where that saint dwelleth?"

"Nay, God bless me," said the fellow then,
"Never saw I palmer with pike-staff or with scrip
"That asked after Truth till ye now in this place."

## HERE FIRST APPEARETH PIERS PLOWMAN

"By Peter," quoth a plowman, and forward put his head,
"I know Truth as well as scholar does his book.
"Conscience and my own wit led me to his place,
"Made me his man to serve him evermore;
"I have been his follower all this fifty winter,
"Sown his seed, herded his beasts,
"Cared for his corn, carried it home,
"In his house, outside his house, watching his profit;
"I ditch, I dig, I do, all that Truth biddeth me,
"Now I sow, and now I thresh, now I weave, now I wind;
"I am his tailor and his tinker, he put me to learn all;
"And, though I myself do say it, I am his good servant,
"And I have good wage from him, sometimes more than good;
"He is the readiest paymaster that poor man can know,
"Never withholds mans hire past the evening time.
"He is gentle as a lamb, lovely in speech;
"If ye will know where Truth dwelleth
"I will show you the way home.

"Yea, dear Piers," quoth they, and offered him money.

"Nay, by my souls health, for all S. Thomas shrine,
"I would not touch a farthing, for were it told to Truth
"He would love me less a long time after.
"But if ye will to go right, *this* is the way thither.

"Ye must go through meekness, all, men and women,
"Till ye come to *Conscience-Love-first-our-Lord-God*
"*And-then-your-neighbour-next-and-as-you-would-*
"*That-he-should-do-to-you-do-ye-to-him.*
"Bend by a brook, *Be-sweet-of-speech*

" And find a ford *Honour-your-father*
" Wade in the water, wash you well there,
" And ye shall leap the nimbler all your life after.
" Then shalt thou see *Swear-not-save-it-be-for-need*
" Swear ye not idly by the name of God Almighty.
" Then shall ye come by a croft, enter not therein,
" It is called *Covet-not-mens-goods-or-wives-or-servants.*
" Break no branch there, save it be thine own.
" Two stocks stand there, *Steal-not, Slay-not,*
" Strike forth by both and leave them on thy left.

" Turn at a hill, *Bear-no-false-witness*
" It is closed in with florins and many another fee:
" Pluck no plant there on peril of thy soul.

" Then shalt thou see *Say-sooth- and-nothing-else-for-any-man.*

" Thou shalt come to a court as bright as the sun,
" The moat around is mercy, the battlements of Christendom,
" The walls of Wit to hold Lust out,
" The Creed its buttress, and all the house is roofed,
" Halls and chambers not with lead but with Love;
" The drawbridge of prayer, the pillars of penance,
" The door-hooks are of alms.

" The gatekeeper is Grace, his man is Amendment;
" Give him this token TRUTH-KNOWS-SOOTH
" I HAVE PERFORMED MY PENANCE, I AM SORRY FOR MY SINS,
" AND SHALL BE WHEN I THINK ON THEM THOUGH I WERE A POPE.

" Bid Amendment ask his Lord to lift the wicket up
" To open and undo the high gate of heaven
" That Adam and Eve against us all shut.

By Eve the door was shut to all, and by the Virgin Mary it again was opened.

" A full loyal lady unlocked it by her grace,
" She hath the key of the lock, tho the king slept,
" And may lead in whom she will as her love pleaseth her.

" And if God grant thee to go in in this wise,
" Thou shalt find Truth resting in thine heart,
" In a chain of charity as tho thou wert a child;
" But beware of Wrath, he is a wicked one,
" For he curseth him that in thy heart is sealed,
" And poketh in pride to make thee praise thyself.
" Thy good deeds make thee bold, thine eyes are blinded,
" Then shalt thou be driven forth, and the door closed,
" Keyed and locked, to keep thee out.
" Haply a hundred winter ere thou shalt enter;
" Think well of thyself and thou mayst lose his love.

" But there are seven sisters ever serving Truth
" Porters of the Posterns; one called Abstinence,
" Humility, Charity, Chastity be the chief maidens there;
" Patience and Peace help many a one,
" Lady Almsgiving lets in full many;
" She hath helped a thousand from the devils pinfold;
" Whoso is akin to these sisters seven
" Wondrous welcome is he and receivèd well;
" Who is not akin to some of them
" It is full hard for you to get entrance at the gate."

" By Christ," says a cut-purse, " no kin have I there,"
" Nor I," says a monkey-man, " for aught I know."
" God help me," says a cake-maker, " if I knew this for true
" No foot further would I go for any friars sermon."

" Yea," says Piers, " go ye on," and pushed all the right way:
" Mercy is a maiden there, mightiest of them all;

" She is akin to all the sinful, she and her son,
" And through their help —hope thou none other—
" Thou mayst get her grace if thou go but in time."

" Yea, I have bought a house," quoth one,
" To see how it pleaseth me." " and I must hie me thither
Another needs must follow *He* took his leave of Piers.
" And I must go at once five yoke of oxen,
" Therefore, I pray you, Piers, and drive them straight;
" Tell Truth I am excused." if perchance ye meet him
" And I have wedded a wife," says one,
" Were I a sevennight from her sight " wanton in her ways,
" And lour on me and lightly chide she would fall into sin,
" Therefore, Piers Plowman, and say I love another;
" I cannot come for Kits sake, I pray thee tell Truth she cleaveth so to me."

Quoth Contemplation, " Though I suffer woe,
" Famine and trouble, I will follow Piers,
" But the way is so bad unless we had a guide
" To follow us each foot for dread of mis-turnings."

" By S. Paul," says a Pardoner, " perchance I am not known there;
" I will go fetch my box of writing and my bishops letters."

" By Christ," says a woman of the streets, " I will come in thy company;
" Thou shalt say I am sister of thine

(*She looks round and sees they two are alone*)

" I know not where they be gone."

# THE VISION OF PIERS COUNSEL TO THE PILGRIMS OF TRUTH

# THE VISION OF PIERS COUNSEL

THEN says Perkin Plowman:
"I have half-an-acre to plough
"Had I ploughed my half-acre
"I would wend with you,

"By S. Peter of Rome
by the high way;
and sown it afterward,
I would show you the way."

"That were a long waiting time,"
"What should we women

said a veiled lady,
work meanwhile?"

"Some shall sew the sacks,
"And ye wives that have wool,
"And spin it speedily,
"Save it be holiday
"Look forth your linen,
"See the needy and the naked,
"Throw clothes upon them,
"For I shall give the poor a living
"For the Lords love in heaven,

for fear the wheat be spilt,
work it fast,
spare not your fingers,
or a saints vigil.
labour ye hard on it,
take thought how *they* lie;
Truth would love that,

as long as I live
unless the land fail.

"And ye lovely ladies,
"Take silk and sendal,
"Chasubles for chaplains

with your long fingers,
and sew while there be time
the churches to honour.

"Wives and widows,
"Make cloth, I counsel you,
"Conscience biddeth you
"For the profit of the poor
"And for all manner men
"Help them to work well,

spin your flax and wool,
and teach your daughters so,
to make the cloth
and for pleasure to yourselves,
that live by meat and drink
who win your food for you."

"By Christ," says a gentleman,
"But on this theme truly
"But lead me," says he,
"I will help thee labour

"Surely, Sir Knight,
"And all my life
"If thou wilt keep
"From the wasters and the wicked
"Go thou and hunt
"The boars and badgers,
"And tame thy falcons
"That come to my croft
Courteously the knight replied:
"By my power, Piers,
"To fulfil the covenant

"But yet one point," says Piers,
"Trouble not thy tenants,
"And though ye be right to fine
"And let meekness be your master
"And though the poor proffer you
"Take them not; perchance
"Thou shall pay it all again
"In the full perilous place

"Do no harm to thy bondman,
"He is here thine underling,
"He may be better set
"Save thou do work
**Friend, go up higher.**

"he teacheth us the best,
never was I taught,
"and I will learn to plough
while my life lasteth."

I shall toil for both of us,
will labour for love of thee,
my church and me

that would us destroy.
the hares and foxes,
that break my hedges down;
wild birds to kill,
and crop my wheat."

I plight thee my troth,
while I may stand."

"I ask thee more;
save Truth assenteth,

let mercy be your tax-master,

for all that Meed may do;

presents and gifts
ye do not them deserve:
at the years end,
named Purgatory.

that it be well with thee,
but it may hap in heaven
and happier too than thou,
and live as thou shouldst.

"At church and in the charnel vault churls be hard to tell
"Or whether one be Queen or quean knight or knave.

"Be thou true of thy tongue, and hate all tales,
"Save of wisdom and sense to chasten thy workmen,
"Tales of kindness of battles or of Truth.

"Hold not with the loose storiers, they are the devils talkers;
"Avoid them at thy meat time. Dost thou understand?"

"I assent," says the knight, "while my life dureth."

"And I," says Piers, "shall apparel me in pilgrims wise,
"And wend with you I will till we find Truth,
"I will cast clothes on me, mended and clouted,
"My stockings, my cuffs, for the cold of my nails,
"And hang my basket round my neck, by way of pilgrims scrip,
"And a bushel of bread-corn within.
"I will sow it myself, and then with you will wend
"On pilgrimage, as palmers do, my pardon to win.
"My ploughfoot shall my pike-staff be, to pick the roots in two,
"And help my hoe to cut and cleanse the furrows.
"And all that help me plough and weed
"Shall have leave by our Lord to come and glean after me,
"And make merry with their winning, let him grudge who will.

"And all kind of craftsmen that can live by Truth,
"I will find them food who live faithfully,—
"Saving Jack the Juggler, and Janet of the Stews,

" And the ribald Robert for his filthy words,
" And Friar the beggar, and Daniel the dicer,
" Truth told me once and bad me tell it after him."
They shall be blotted from the book of life.
" No tithe shall be taken, no tithe be asked of them
They shall not be written with the righteous.
" They are in luck; they need not pay; God mend them.

" Now am I old and hoar, I have goods of my own,
" On pilgrimage and in penance will I pass with all these others
" And, ere I wend, will write my will and testament."

## THE TESTAMENT OF PIERS PLOWMAN

" In the name of God, amen, I make this testament myself.

" He shall have my soul, that all souls made,
" And defend it from the Fiend, for so is my faith,
" Till I come to his account, as my Creed telleth me,
" And gain forgiveness of my debts and remission of my sins;
" On that remission I believe.

" The Church shall have my body and shall keep my bones,
" Of my corn and of my substance; I paid her my tithes,
" I paid her readily, for peril of my soul;
" She is bound, I hope, to bear me in mind,
" And keep me in her memory with all Christian souls.

" My wife shall have that I earned, earned with truth and no more,
" And share it with my friends, and my dear children.
" Though I should die to-day, my debts are paid;

" I bare back all I borrowed ere I went home to bed,
" And with the residue, by Chester Rood,
" I will honour Truth with it and be his pilgrim at the plough,
" For poor mens sake."

(*The narration proceeds*)

Now are Piers and the pilgrims to the ploughing gone,
To plough his half-acre; many a one helped him,
Ditchers and delvers dug up the ridges,
Thereat was Piers pleased and paid their full wages.
Others there were that worked full willingly,
Each man in his way found him work to do,
And some to please Perkin picked away the weeds.

At high prime Piers let the plough stand
And himself looked over all to see who best had wrought,
He should be hired again in harvest time.

Some did their work thus; they sat and sang and drank,
And helped to plough the half-acre with, " Hey trolly lolly."

" Now by the prince of Paradise," says Piers in his wrath,
" If ye rise not straightway and haste you to work,
" No grain that groweth here shall gladden you at need,
" Nay though ye die for dole —devil take him that cares."

Then were idlers afeard, and feigned them to be blind,
Some crooked their legs beneath them, as such beggars can,
And made their moan to Piers how that they *could* not work.

" But, Piers, we will pray for you, for you and for your plough,
" That God in His grace will multiply your grain,
" And pay you back for all your alms that you have given us here;
" We, we can neither toil nor sweat, such sickness aileth us."

"If ye were good," says Piers, "your prayers might help me well,

"But high Truth will have no tricks in folk that go a-begging.
"Ye be wastrels, I know well, wasting and devouring
"All that good land-tilling men lawfully toil for.
"But Truth shall teach you how to drive his team:—
"Or barley bread shall be your food and the brook give you drink.

"But if any be blind, broken-shanked, iron-bolted,
"He shall eat wheaten bread, and drink as well as I,
"Till God in his goodness send him better days."

"But ye, ye *could* work as Truth would; ye *could* earn meat and drink,
"Keeping kine in the field, keeping beasts from the corn,
"Ditching and delving, threshing the sheaves,
"Helping to make mortar, or bearing muck afield.

"In lechery, in lying, and in sloth ye live,
"And only through sufferance doth Vengeance pass you by.
"Hermits and anchorites, that keep them in their cells,
"They shall have of my alms all the while I live,
"And friars that flatter not, and poor sick folks,
"What! I and mine shall find them all that they need.

"But Robert Gadabout he shall have nought of me
"Nor preachers, saving they *can* preach and have the bishops leave,
"They shall have bread and pottage and make themselves at ease,
"Religion is unreasonable that hath no certain pay."

Then gan a wastrel rise in wrath and would have fought with Piers,

Threw down his glove, a Breton man, a braggart,
Bad Piers go with his plough for a cursèd starveling.

"Wilt thou or wilt thou not, we will have our will
"Of thy flour and of thy flesh, will take it when we please,
"Ay and make merry with it for all thy grudging."

Then PIERS PLOWMAN complained him to the knight,
To keep him as his covenant was from the wolfish wastrels:
"Avenge me of these wastrels that make the world so dear,
"There be no plenty in the land and the plough lieth still."

Courteously the knight, as his manner was,
Warned wastrels all and bad them do better:
"Or thou shalt dear aby it, by my knightly order,
"I shall beat thee by the law and bring thee to the stocks."
"I was not wont to work," says Wastrel, "and I will not begin."
Made light of the law, set less by the knight,
Piers was worth a peascod, he and his plough,
And threatened Piers and his men when next they met.

"By my souls peril," says PIERS PLOWMAN,
"I will repay you all for your proud words,"
And shouted after Hunger, (Hunger heard him soon),
"Take vengeance on these wastrels, for the knight will not."

Hunger came in haste, took Wastrel by the mouth,
Wrung him by the womb, brought water to his eyes.

He buffeted the Breton man about both his cheeks,
That he looked like a lantern all his life after.
He beat both the boys, he near burst their ribs.

Had not Piers with a pease loaf prayed Hunger cease
They had like been in their graves.
" Have mercy on them, Hunger, and let me boil them beans,
" Suffer them to live, and let them eat with hogs;
"What was baked for my horses shall be their food."

Idlers for fear of this fled into barns,
Flapped away with flails, from morning to evening,
That Hunger was not bold enough to cast an eye on them
For a potful of peases that Piers wife made them.
A heap of hermits took them spades,
Cut their copes away, made them short coats,
Went out as workmen to weed and mow,
Digging and ditching;
Spaded, spread dung, to drive Hunger away.

Blind and bedridden were healed by the thousand,
Lame men he cured with lungs of beasts;
They that lay broken legged, sitting to beg silver,
On soft warm Sundays by the high way,
Them Hunger healed with a red-hot cake.

Lame mens limbs were loosened and lithe;
They became servants to keep Piers beasts,
And prayed for charity to dwell with him,
For the sake of his bread to drive Hunger away.
For what was baked for the horses was food for the hungry,
And many a beggar ready to sweat for beans,
And every poor man well paid to take pease for his hire,
Ready as a sparrowhawk to do Piers bidding.

Piers was proud of that and put them all to work,
Daubing and delving, whittling wooden pins,
Gave them meat and money as they might deserve;
Then had Piers pity on all poor people,

And bade Hunger in haste hie out of the land,
Home to his own place and keep him ever there,
"I am well avenged," says he, "on wastrels through thy power,

"Yet I pray thee ere thou wend
"What is best to be done with bidders and beggars
"For well I wot when thou art gone ill will they work.
"Mischief it maketh, for now they be so weak,
"For default of food, this folk is at my will.
"Not for love do they work but for fear of famine.

"There is no final love in them for all their fair speeches,
"Yet be they my brethren, God bought us all.
"Truth taught me once to love each one of them
"And help them in all things after their need.
"Now would I know of thee what were the best,
"How I may master them and make them work."

"Hear now," quoth Hunger, "and hold my words for wisdom,

"Bold and big beggars that well can work
"Thin them down with beans with horse bread and hounds bread,

"And if the men grumble bid them to work
"The sweeter shall their supper be when they have earned it.

"And if thou find any folk that ill fortune hath harmed,
"Or fire or evil men, try such to know;
"Comfort them with thy goods, for Christs love in heaven,
"Love them, lend to them, Gods law teacheth so.

Bear ye one anothers burdens.

"And all kind of men in mischief and disease,
"Love them and blame them not —let God take vengeance—

" Though they have evil done —let God alone for that—
Vengeance is mine, and I will repay.
" And if thou wilt be dear to God do as the Gospel teacheth.
" Make thee loved among the lowly so shalt thou get grace;
Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness.
" God I would not grieve," said Piers, " for all the gold in earth,
" May I do as thou sayest and yet sinless be? "

" Yea, I bid thee," says Hunger, " or else the Bible lieth,
" Go to Genesis the beginning the father of us all."
With swynk and swot and sweating face
Toil thou and travel and truly win thy living.

" And Wisdom saith the same I saw it in the Bible.
The sluggard would not plough for sloth; he shall beg in winter and it shall not be given him.

" Matthew with a mans face tells of one that lent,
" To three manner of men to traffick with, to profit by,
" And he that best laboured was best allowed,
" And for his labouring was lord of his lords goods,
" The wicked servant had a talent but as he would not work
" Nothing had he of his master ever more after.

" Common sense wills that every wight should work
" In ditching or in digging, in teaching or in prayer,
" Life active or life contemplative.
" The man that feedeth himself in faithful labour
" He is blessed by the Book in body and in soul."
For thou shalt eat the labour of thy hands, etcetera.
" By Christ," quoth Piers the Plowman, " these sentences will I show

"To the beggars and the boys that are so loth to work;
"But yet I pray you of your charity if ye know any leechcraft,
"Teach it me, my dear, for some of my servants
"Work not for a whole week so much our body acheth."

"Ye have eaten over much," quoth Hunger, "that maketh you groan.
"I bid thee drink no day ere thou have somewhat eaten,
"And eat not I bid thee ere hunger take thee;
"And send thee his sauce to taste with thy lips.
"Keep some till supper time, sit not too long,
"Arise ere appetite hath gotten his fill.

"Let not Lord Surfeit sit down at thy table,
"For he is lecherous and of lickerish tongue,
"And after many kinds of meat he is an-hungerd still.

"Dives for his delicate life to the devil went,
"And Lazarus the lean that longèd for the crumbs,
"(And yet he gat them not, for I, Hunger, killed him),
"Yet, since, I saw him sit, as he a Lord were,
"In all manner of ease, in Abrahams lap;
"And if thou be a man of power, Piers, I counsel thee,
"To all that cry at thy gate for food for love of God,
"Give them of thy bread, thy pottage and thy sauce,
"Give them of thy loaf, yea, though thou have less to chew,

"And though liars and latch-lifters and lollers go on knocking
"Let them bide till the board be put aside,
"But bear no crumbs to them,
"Till thy needy neighbours have made their meal.
"If thus thou diet thee I will wager both mine ears
"Physick shall sell his furred hood to get him food withal,

" And shall pawn for his dinner his Italian cloak,
" And be fain to let his physick go and labour with his hands;
" For many doctors be murderers (God mend them)
" And men die through their drinks ere destiny would have it."

" By S. Paul," quoth Piers, " thou pointest nigh the truth,
" Wend thy way when thou wilt and be it well with thee;
" This is a lovely lesson, Lord grant thee recompence."

" I will not hence," says Hunger, " ere I have dined and drunk."

Says Piers " I have no penny pullets for to buy,
" No, neither goose nor pig, but only two green cheeses,
" A few curds, a little cream, and a haver-cake,
" And two loaves of beans and bran baked for my little ones;
" And, by my soul, I say I have no salt bacon,
" No nor a cookboy collops to make,
" But I have parsley, cabbage, leeks and a cow and a calf,
" And a mare to draw the dung afield while the drought lasteth;
" And on this living we must live till Lammas time,
" By then I hope to have harvest in my croft,
" Then may I do thee thy dinner as I fain would do."
But all the poor people fetched their peascods,
Their beans and baken apples, they brought them in their laps,
Onions and salads, and many ripe cherries,
And prepared Piers this present to please Hunger withal.

Hunger ate it all in haste, and asked for more,
Then poor people for fear fed Hunger gladly;
With pease and green onions they thought to poison him.

By this it came near harvest time, new corn was in the market,
Then folk were fain feed Hunger with the best,
With good ale as Glutton bad, and made Hunger go sleep.

Then would not the wastrels work but wandered about,
Nor would beggars eat bread with beans in it,
But stamped bread, fine bread, clean wheaten bread;
They would no halfpenny ale, but of the best and brownest.

Labourers with no land but only their hands work
Deigned not to dine on day-old vegetables;
No penny a gallon did for them nor a piece of bacon,
But pork, fish or fresh flesh, fried or baked,
And that *chaud, plus chaud,* for the chill of their maw.

And but he has high wages else will he chide,
And bewail the day he ever became a working man;
Curses the king with a will, and all his Parliament,
That make such laws to keep the labourer down.

But while Hunger here was lord none then would chide,
Nor strive against the statute book, so stern did Hunger look.
But I warn you all ye workmen earn while ye can,
Hunger is fast coming hitherward again;
Hunger shall wake and come with floods to chasten the wastrel,
Ere few years are fulfilled famine shall arise.

So saith Saturn
WHEN YE SEE THE SUN
AMISS,
AND A MAIDEN BE QUEEN,

THE PLAGUE SHALL GO
AWAY HOME,
AND DAN THE DITCHER
SAVE GOD IN HIS GOOD-
NESS

and sent me to warn you

AND TWO MONKS HEADS,
THEN MULTIPLY BY
EIGHT,

DEARTH SHALL BE JUDGE,
SHALL DIE FOR HUNGER,

GRANT US A TRUCE.

# THE VISION
OF
# GODS BULL OF PARDON

# THE VISION OF GODS BULL OF PARDON

TRUTH heard tell of all
And bid him take his team
And brought him a Pardon,
For Piers and for Piers heirs
"Bide thou at home," said Truth,
And all that should help Piers
Or do aught else,
To them Truth granted;

Kings and knights
Who rule the people
They have Pardon too,
And fellowship in paradise

And consecrated bishops,
If they preach to the people

And, if they can, amend
And dread no lords,
And are bitter on bad men,
And fear not to put down,
Lechery among lords
They are one with the apostles;

And they sit on the high thrones

And merchants—in the margin

he sent to Piers
and till the earth
Pardon and forgiveness,
for evermore.

"and plough thy field;"
to set or sow
Pardon perpetual
PARDON,—WITH PIERS.

that Holy Church defend,
in their realms righteously,
light purgatory,
with patriarchs and prophets.

if their lives be holy,
to love God and their neighbour,
all sinful souls,
and are mild to the good,
unless they repent,
as far as they may,
and their evil ways,
PIERS PARDON PROVES IT,

at the Judgment Day.

—had many a year remitted,

But no full pardon (the Pope granted them not that)

And why? They keep not holy days as they are bidden,
They swear, "By my soul, God help me it is so,"
And sell their goods with oaths and their clean consciences defile.

But under secret seal Truth sent them a letter:
"Buy your goods boldly, buy when ye will,
"And sell when ye will, and take your winnings,
"But use ye your winnings to rebuild almshouses,
"To maintain the scholar, to help the stricken,
"To dower girls or make them nuns,
"To build the broken bridge, and mend the bad road,
"To help the monks, and make rents reasonable,
"And I will send you Michael my archangel,
"And never a fiend shall frighten you or harm you at your death;
"For I will save you from all despair,
"And bring your souls in safety to my saints in joy."

Then were merchants merry and wept for gladness,
And praised Piers Plowman for the Pardon he had gotten.

The least pardon of all had the Men of Law,
Who pleaded for bribes and condemned the innocent.

Lawyers should take pains to plead for the innocent and help them
And princes and bishops should pay the lawyers fee.
Thou shalt not take gifts upon the innocent.

But many a magistrate, and many a jury,
Will do more for John than for Gods love,
But a lawyer that spendeth his speech and speaketh for the poor

The innocent and needy poor that never hath harmed any,
Who comforteth the poor and taketh no fee,
And declareth law for our Lords love,
No devil on his deathbed shall have him a whit,
The Psalter beareth witness, he and his soul are safe.
**Lord, who shall dwell . . .**

For who would buy or sell water, wind, or wit, or fire,
These four our Heavenly Father gave to his sheep for common use,
Treasures of Truth the true to help,
And never shall they wax or wane save by Gods will.

Ye who plead for the poor and take money at their hands,
Ye lawyers, ye advocates, be sure of this;
When ye draw near to death, and pray for pardon,
Your pardon at your parting hence will be but small;
S. Matthew bids me tell you this and if I lie blame *him*.
**Whatever ye would that men should do to you, do ye also unto them.**

But for all that labour for their lives,
Fair work, fair wages, humbly living,
These have the Pardon perpetual PIERS PLOWMANS PARDON.

Tramps and beggars, nay, their names are not there,
Except their beggary be true, and their plea fair,
Else they be false as hell, and they defraud the needy,
And beguile the giver, who, if he knew the truth,
Would give to the poor indeed and help the neediest of all.
Cato knoweth these men well and the master of stories
**See to whom thou givest.**

And again

**Keep thine alms in thine hand and watch to whom thou givest**

But yet Gregory the good bad us give to all
To all that ask for Him that gave us all.

**Choose not whom thou shalt pity.**

Ye know not who is worthy, God knoweth who hath need;
The treason is in him that taketh, if treason be,
For the giver giveth, and the beggar borroweth,
Beggars are ever borrowers, their surety is almighty God,
Who giveth to them that gave *—and their interest—*

**Why dost thou not give my money to the bank . . . ?**

Beg not, beggars, save ye have great need,
Whoso hath money to buy him bread, he hath enough.

The neediest are our neighbours if we give heed to them,
Prisoners in the dungeon, the poor in the cottage,
Charged with a crew of children and with a landlords rent.
What they win by their spinning to make their porridge with,
Milk and meal, to satisfy the babes,—
The babes that continually cry for food—
This they must spend on the rent of their houses,
Ay and themselves suffer with hunger,
With woe in winter rising a-nights,
In the narrow room to rock the cradle,
Carding, combing, clouting, washing, rubbing, winding, peeling rushes.
Pitiful is it to read the cottage-womens woe,
Ay and many another that puts a good face on it,
Ashamed to beg, ashamed to let neighbours know

All that they need, noontide and evening.
Many the children, and nought but a mans hands
To clothe and feed them; and few pennies come in,
And many mouths to eat the pennies up.

Bread and thin ale for them are a banquet,
Cold flesh and cold fish are like roast venison,
A farthings worth of mussels, a farthings worth of cockles
Were a feast for them on Friday or fast-days,
It were charity to help these that be at heavy charges,
To comfort the cottager, the crooked and the blind.

But for beggars with their bags, whose churches are the taverns,
Save they be blind or broken, or else sick,
Reck not, ye rich, but let such wastrels starve;
For every man that hath his health, his eyes and his limbs
If he useth a lollers life he liveth against Gods law.

Yet are there other beggars, in health enow,
But they want wit, men and women,
Lunatic lollers, leaping around,
Mad as the moon changes, witless, moneyless,
Caring for neither cold nor heat, wandering walkers,
As Peter and Paul wandered yet preaching not,
But many a time prophesying, to please themselves it seems,
Yet since God is strong enough
To give to each man wit, wealth and health,
And lets them go, these lunatics, they are, I think,
His apostles, his private disciples;
He sent them silverless, in summer raiment clad,
With neither bread nor baggage.
Barefoot go these disciples, begging of men,
If they meet the mayor amidst the street,
They reverence him not, no, no more than another.
Such men we should have home, and help them when they come.

They are merry singers, heavens minstrels,
Gods boys, jesters, as the Bible saith;
If any man is seen to be wise let him be made a fool that he be wise.

It is the way of the rich to keep all manner of minstrels,
For the lords and ladies sake in whose house they stay,
Men suffer all they say and take it in good part,
Ay and give them gifts and gold, ere they go thence,
Right so, ye rich, ye should welcome and honour
Gods minstrels, Gods messengers and Gods merry jesters.
These lunatic lollers that leap around you
For under Gods secret seal hidden are their sins.

They carry no bags, they hide no bottles,
They are not like the lollers and the hermits false,
Slyly lurking to catch mens alms.
Hoping to sit at eventide by the house fire,
Uncross their legs and lie at their ease,
Resting them, roasting them, turning round to the fire,
Drinking to the last drop, slowly turning to bed,
And when they will and please, in morning to arise,
And, when they rise, roam out, and easily espy
Where they may get a breakfast, first a round of bacon,
Silver or sod meat and sometimes both,
A loaf, half a loaf, a lump of cheese,
And home they carry it to their hovels
And live in idleness while others work.
Every fellow of their flock that wanders about,
Bag at his back, beggar-fashion,
And yet knows some kind of craft, which, if he would,
Could get him bread and ale and a suit of raiment
And yet lives like a loller —Gods law damns him.

"Lollers living in sloth, and country stalkers,
"Are not in my Pardon till they be amended.
"The Book blameth all beggary, it banneth it thus;
**I have been young and now am old yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging their bread.**
It needeth none to preach anon
And tell these lollers what the Bible meaneth;
It blameth all beggars, be ye full certain,
They live in no love, they keep no law,
They wed no women, with whom they have to do,
They bring forth bastards, beggars like themselves,
They break a childs back, they break his bones,
And go a-begging with infants for evermore after;
There are more mis-shapen among such beggars,
Than in all other trades that walk this world.

They that live this life have no part in Pardon
In penance or in prayer.

But old white-headed men, that be helpless and needy,
And women with child, that cannot work,
The blind, the bed-ridden, the halt and lame,
And all poor sufferers, quiet under Gods sending,
Lepers and the truly poor, and men fallen on evil days,
Prisoners, pilgrims, and robbed men,
Men slandered on the sly and their goods lost,
Men brought to poverty by fire or flood,
Who take their mischief meekly, and mildly at heart,
For their humility our Lord hath granted
Penance and purgatory here on earth,
And A PARDON WITH PIERS, PARDON AND FORGIVENESS,
And all holy hermits shall have the same.

But hermits that dwell by the roadside,
And in inns among brewers, that beg in churches,

Seeking all that holy hermits hate and despise,
Such as riches, reverence, and rich mens alms,
(These lollers and latchlifters covet it all)
Now, naturally, by Christ, be such called lollers,
For by English of elders and old mens teaching
He that lolleth is lame, his leg out of joint,
Is maimed in some member, it meaneth some mischief;
Even so truly such manner of hermits
Loll against the Creed and the Law of Holy Church.
Where see ye them on Sundays the service to hear,
As at mattins in the morning till mass begin?
Or labouring for their living as the law would?
But at midday mealtime I meet with them oft,
Coming in a cope, as if they clergy were,
And for the cloth upon him he is called Friar;
He washeth and wipeth and sitteth with the best.
When he worked in this world and won his meat honestly,
He sat at the side-bench and at the second table;
No wine came then his way through the long week,
Nor blanket on his bed nor white bread before him.
The cause of all this caitiffry cometh from many bishops
Who suffer such sloth and other sins to reign.

"Piers," quoth a priest then, "thy Pardon I must read,
"I will construe each clause for thee and teach it thee in English."

Piers at his prayer unfolded his Pardon,
And I stood behind them both and beheld all the bull,
All in two lines it lay, not a letter more.
**They that have done good shall go to life eternal**
**But they that have done evil to everlasting fire**
"In sooth," says the priest then, "I can see no Pardon here,
"Only—'Do well and fare well— and—God shall save thy soul—

—'Do evil and fare evil— to hell shalt thou wend—
—'Hope for nought else— after thy death day.' "—
And Piers for pure anger pulled the Pardon in two
And, says he,
If I walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me.
"I shall cease my sowing," quoth Piers, "and work not so hard,
"And I shall not be so busy about by belly and its joys,
"I will weep, not sleep, though I eat no wheaten bread,
"The prophet ate his bread in penance and in sorrow,
"And many another as the psalter saith,
"That loveth God loyally his living is simple.
My tears have been my meat day and night.
"And Luke teacheth us by the fowls of the air,
"Not to be too busy about the worlds bliss,
"And showeth us by example how to teach ourselves;
"The fowls in the field, who finds them meat in winter?
"No garner to go to have they, God findeth for them all."

"What," quoth the priest, "thou art learned then.
"Who taught thee, Perkyn, to read thy book?"

"Abbess Abstinence," says Piers, "taught me a.b.c.
"Conscience followed, and taught me much more."

"Wert thou only a priest, Piers, thou mightest preach anywhere,
"Doctor of Divinity and for thy text
The fool hath said.

"Ignorant loon," says Piers, "little lookest thou on thy Bible,
"Seldom hast thou beheld King Solomons saws"
Cast out the scorner and his scorning with him.

The priest and Piers jangled of the Pardon,
I through their words awoke, and waited about,
And saw the sun in the south sinking at even.
Meatless and moneyless, on Malvern Hills,
I mused upon this dream, and went upon my way.

Many a time hath this dream made me to study,
For love of PIERS PLOWMAN
And for his Pardon, for the comfort of all people,
And how the priest reviled it with "*The fool hath said*——"
But I have no care of dreams; oft I see them fail,
Cato and Church lawyers bid us to leave them.
Care not for dreams.
Yet the Bible, the Book, it beareth witness,
How Daniel divined for a king his dream,
To Nebuchadnezzar, so named by the learned;
And Daniel said, "Sir king, the dream is this;
"Strange knights shall come and cleave thy kingdom,
"And among humbler lords thy land be parted;"
"And as he divined it fell out indeed
"The king lost his lordship, and humbler men took it.

"Ay, and Joseph dreamed —the sun and moon
"And the eleven stars bowed all to him,—
"Then Jacob judged him: '*Beau fils*,' quoth he,
"'In famine we all shall seek thee in our need.'"

So befel it in Pharaohs time,
Joseph was justice and governed Egypt,
As his father had said, his friends sought Joseph.
All this maketh me think somewhat of dreams,
Many a time at midnight when men should sleep,
I think on PIERS THE PLOWMAN and the Pardon that he had,
And how the priest attacked it and reasoned it away,
But I deem that Do-well had need of no indulgence,

Nor of pardon for two years, pardon for three years,
Or Bishops letters.
Do-well at Doomsday is worthily received
And doth without any pardon of S. Peters church,
The pope hath no power to grant a pardon,
For men without penance to pass to Paradise,
This is a leaf out of my creed as learned men teach me.
**Whatever thou shalt bind on earth . . .**
And so I believe with fealty, God forbid otherwise,
That pardon and penance and prayer *do* save
Souls that have sinned seven times and deadly;
But for your three-years pardon, truly, methinks,
It is not so certain for a soul as Do-well is.

Therefore, I counsel you, ye rich upon this earth,
Who trust for your treasure to have your three-years pardons,
Be ye not bold enough to break the Ten Commandments,
And specially, ye masters, ye mayors and judges,
Ye that have the worlds wealth, and be holden wise,
When ye purchase pardon, and papal bulls,
At the dreadful Doomsday, when the dead shall rise,
And all come before Christ to give account,
How did we lead our lives, how did we keep the laws,
How did we day by day, *this* the judgment will rehearse.
Though ye be a Brother of all the Orders Five,
Though ye have a pocket full, Pardons and Absolutions,
And Doublefold Indulgences, unless Do-well can help you,
Your patents and your pardons will be worth—a piecrust.

Therefore I counsel Christian souls, Cry God mercy
And Mary his mother to be our go-between
That God give us grace, ere we go hence,

Such works to work, while we be here,
That after our death day Do-well may say
At the day of doom, we did as he taught.
Amen.

Here endeth Williams Vision of Piers Plowman.

*(A brief abstract follows of the books not fully transcribed.)*

# THE VISIONS OF DO-WELL, DO-BETTER AND DO-BEST

# THE VISIONS OF DO-WELL, DO-BETTER AND DO-BEST

## DO-WELL

THUS robed in russet I roamed about,
All a summer season Do-well to seek,
And oft I asked the folk I met
Where Do-well was and what man he might be.
Never wight as I went could tell me where,
Till on a Friday two Friars I saw;
For they be men that walk most widely
Through countries, courts, and many kinds of places,
Princes palaces, and poor mens cots,
And know Do-well—and Do-evil.

"Among us," quoth they, "that man is dwelling
"And ever hath been and ever shall be."

"Nay," said I, "man sins seven times a day,
"Therefore he is not alway among you Friars,
"He is elsewhere now and then and teacheth the people."

"My son," said the Friar, "I shall soon show thee
"How the good man sinneth seven times a day.

"Set a man in a boat on a broad water;
"The wind and the water and boat wagging
"Make him stumble, if he stand never so stiffly;
"Through steering the boat he bendeth and boweth,
"Yet is he safe and sound so is it with the righteous;

" Though he fall he falleth not, —he is in the boat—
" And he is safe and sound.
" Thus is it with men; the water is the world,
" Goods are the great waves, wallowing about,
" The boat is our body;
" And thro the fiend and the flesh and the frail world
" The just man sinneth seven times a day.

" But deadly sin he doth not, Do-well him guardeth,
" He strengtheneth man to stand and steereth his soul,
" And though thy body bow as boat doth in the water,
" Yet is thy soul safe."

" Nay I cannot understand all your wise words,
" But if I live and look about me I shall go learn better."

" Christ keep thee," quoth he; and I said, " Christ keep you
" And give you grace good men to be."

Thus I went wide-where, walking alone,
In a wide wilderness, by a wood side.
Bliss of the birds song made me abide there,
And on a lawn under a linden I leaned awhile
To listen to their lays, their lovely notes;
The mirth of their mouths made me to sleep,
And mid that bliss I dreamed—marvellously.

Thought came and gave me over to Wit to tell me where dwelt Do-well. And Wit told me, " In a castle near, watched by Sense, and the Castles name is Flesh;" and Wit spoke much to me on the foolishness of man. But Wits wife came, named Study, lean of body, and wondrous wroth with him. Quoth she,

" Wise art thou, Wit, wisdom to tell
" To fools or flatterers or frantic folk."

She blamed him, she banned him, she bad him be still,
"Cast not your pearls to hogs; they have their haws.
"Wisdom and Wit now are not worth a cress
"Save when carded with covetise as clothiers comb their wool;
"Whoso can contrive deceit, conspire to wrong,
"Lead a merry meeting and Truth beguile,
"His counsel is called for."

It was so in Jobs time, it is so to-day, said she. They that preach the truth are little cared for. You find men arguing of Christ, arguing of the Trinity, drivelling about the Deity when their belly is full.

"But the careful cry and call at their gates,
"Hungry, thirsty, chilly quaking,
"None calls him nearer his woes to amend,
"They shoo him off as a hound and bid him go,
"God is not in that house nor His help neither.

"The learned talk of God, and His name is on their lips
"But the poor have Him in their heart.

"God is deaf now-a-days and deigneth not hear us,
"And prayers have no power the Plague to stay,
"Yet the wretches of this world take no heed of it,
"Nor for dread of death withdraw them from pride,
"Nor share their plenty with the poor;
"But in gaiety, in gluttony they glut themselves with wealth,
"And the more they win, wealth and riches,
"And lord it over lands, the less they part with.

"Hast thou much, spend generously; so says the Book,

"Whoso hath little spend as he may.
"We have no warrant of our lives how long they be,
"These lessons, lords should love to hear,
"And not to fare like fiddlers or Friars
"From one feast to another at other mens houses
"And hate abiding at home;
"Miserable is the hall where lord and lady will not sit;
"Now have the rich a rule to eat by themselves,
"In a private parlour or in a chamber with a chimney
"Because of the poor in the hall."

Thus Study railed at her husband and at me.

And when Wit was ware what the dame said,
He was dumb as death and drew him back,
And smiled and louted and looked at Study,
In sign I should her grace beseech.

"Mercy," said I, "madame, your man I am,
"To work your will while my life lasteth.
"Tell me what is Do-well."

"For thy meekness, man, and thy mild speech,
"I will send thee to my cousins Clergy and Scripture.

"Give Clergy this sign; I set him to school
"And greet his wife Scripture, I taught her all,
"Logic I taught her, music I taught her,
"Grammar for boys I bad men write,
"And would they learn not I beat them with a broom;
"I made tools for every craft,
"For carpenters, carvers, and the compass for masons;
"Taught them level and line, though now I look blind.
"But Theology wearied me ten score times,
"The more I muse thereon the mistier it seemeth."

Then I thanked her and went on my way to Learning (Clergy) and got his words. He told me Do-well was to believe the articles of the faith; but his talk was long.

" This is a long lesson," quoth I, " and little am I the wiser,
" Ye show me but darkly where Do-well or Do-better is;
" Many tales ye tell me, taught by Theology,
" That I was made man and my name entered
" In the Legend of Life long ere I was born,
" Or else un-entered in the Book for some wickedness of mine."

But, I said, I find the unexpected in heaven and the builders of holy church in danger of being lost, as were the carpenters of Noahs ark who never got inside.

" On Good Friday I find a felon was saved,
" That all his life had lived with lying and with theft·
" Yet for he repented him and shrove him to Christ
" He was sooner saved than S. John the Baptist
" Or than Adam or Isaiah or any of the Prophets
" That had lain with Lucifer many long years;
" A robber was ransomed rather than they
" Without purgatory penance to perpetual bliss.

" Then, Mary Magdalen, what woman lived worse?
" Who worse than David that Uriah destroyed,
" Or Paul the Apostle that had no pity;
" The doughtiest doctor Augustine the old
" Said thus in a sermon, I saw it once,
**Lo, very idiots seize heaven, and we wise are plunged in hell.**
" None sooner ravished from the right creed
" Than cunning clerks that con most books,
" None sooner saved, none surer in creed,
" Than plowmen, shepherds, and poor common people,
" Cobblers and labourers, land-tilling folk,
" Pierce with a prayer the palace of heaven.

"Ye men know clerks that curse the day
"That ever they learnt more than this,
**I believe in God the Father.**

Then Scripture scorned me and gave reasons,
And blamed me—in Latin and set light by me,
And I wept for woe and wrath at her speech
And in a winking I was brought away.

I met then with Fortune and, with her, two damsels, Lust of the Eyes and Lust of the Flesh and Recklessness, who praised poverty to me;

"Although it be sore to suffer there cometh sweet after,
"As without a walnut is a bitter bark,
"And after that, the shell being gone,
"Is a kernel of comfort; so is it with poverty.
"It maketh man have mind on God and his mercy crave,
"And safer he sleepeth, the man that is poor,
"And dreadeth death less, or the thief in the dark,
"Than the right rich man —reason beareth witness—
**I am poor and pray and thou art rich and art heavy.**

"Lo, lo, lords, lo, and ladies, take heed,
"Not so long doth it last, your liquor sweet,
"As peascods and pears, as cherries and plums,
"Worldly wealth is a wicked thing to them that keep it."

He went on to speak to me of Abraham and Job—both poor men once; and told me of the merchant and the messenger. No one stayeth the messenger upon his message (even though he go through the standing corn), for it is urgent and he is but poor; but the merchant is stayed and pays money on his goods and is in fear of robbery to boot;

"Ye wit well, ye wise, what this meaneth,
"The merchants are the rich, to Christ accountable,

" They must hold the high way and the ten Commandments
" And have pity and help men out of their riches,
" Tithe their goods truly and Christ is their toll-taker; "
**Bear ye one anotbers burdens and so fulfil tbe law of Cbrist.**

Then after Recklessness had spoken, Nature came near and complained that all animals excepting man follow Reason, and I saw it was so;

I bowed my body, beholding all about me,
Saw sun and sea, and the sand of the shore,
Where birds and beasts with their mates wandered,
Wild serpents in the woods and wonderful birds,
Flecked with many a coloured feather;
Man and his mate, Peace and War,
Poverty and plenty, bliss and bitter bale;
And I saw all beasts following Reason,
In eating and drinking and gendering their kind;
Man and his mate alone were Reason-less.
Birds I beheld making nests in the bushes,
I wondered from whom and where the pie learnt
To lay the sticks that lie in her nest,
Hiding and covering that no fool should find;
In marshes on moors in mire and in water
Divers dived. " Dear God," said I,
" Where gat these wild things wit? "
But that which most moved me changing my mood,
Was that I saw all beasts following Reason,
Save man and mankind;
" Wherefore," said I, " so widely thou reignest
" Dost thou not rule man and his mate?
" None surfeit as he does and keep not measure,
" In meat and in drink, in dress and in women,
" They overdo it day and night and only they—none other."
But Reason reasoned me; " Reck thou never
" Why I suffer or suffer not.
" Who suffereth more than God? " " No man, by my life,

"He might amend in a minute all that is amiss,
"But He suffereth to show us that we should all suffer."

Then I saw one near me called Imagination. He rebuked me for my ignorance and for my presumption in that I thought I knew how God ruled the world of man and bird and beast. Nature understandeth more than man. Man knoweth little; no, he knoweth not why Adam ate the apple, nor why the homely lark is sweeter than the rich peacock, nor whether Saracens shall come to heaven, where the pagan Trajan is. "Hadst thou held thy tongue," said he, "thou hadst been wise."

And therewith I awaked all but witless,
And forth gan walk in mendicant wise,
And my dreams I pondered.
Fortune had failed me at my most need,
Age had threatened me that all my power should vanish,
Friars had shown me they followed the rich,
And no corpse in their kirkyard would they bury,
If he had not bequeathed them to quit their debts,
And Nature had told me his love for beasts,
And Imagination had spoken and vanished.

And I lay down and slept again.

Then came Conscience to comfort me,
And bad me come to his court with Learning to dine.
There saw I a master, his name I knew not,
That louted low to Scripture, and Conscience knew him,
They washed and wiped and went to dinner,
But Patience in the palace stood in pilgrims clothes,
And prayed for meat for charity, as he a palmer were,
Like to PIERS PLOWMAN.

The master was made sit as one that was most worthy

And Learning and Conscience and Patience—came after.
Patience and I were put to be mates
At a side-table.

They served us with simple food; but the master and his man on the high dais would eat nothing but the daintiest food, the sins of men.

Patience was proud of that proper service,
And made mirth at his meat but I mourned ever,
For the doctor on the dais drank wine so fast;
He ate sundry meats, minces and puddings,
Wild boar and tripe, and eggs in grease fried,
Then said I to myself, and Patience heard it,
"'Tis not four days since, before the Dean of S. Pauls,
"This fellow preached of the penance of Paul;
"Why, this Gods glutton with his great cheeks
"Hath no pity on us poor; evil he performeth,
"What he preacheth he liveth not;" and I wished well
That the dishes and the plates were molten in his maw
And Mahomet the devil with them.
But I sat still as Patience bad and soon the doctor
Rubbed his cheeks as ruddy as a rose;
"What is Do-well, Sir Doctor, does Do-better do penance?"

"Do-well," quoth the doctor, —and took the cup and drank—
"Do thy neighbour no harm, nor thyself neither."

"By this day, Sir Doctor, ye do not well,
"Ye have harmed us two, ye ate the pudding,
"Minces and other meat, no morsel had we,
"I would change my penance with yours."

"Now, Learning," said Conscience, "tell us what is Do-well."

"I have seven sons," said he, "serving in a castle,
"Where liveth the lord of Life to teach them Do-well,
"Till I see those seven have me excused,
"For one PIERS PLOWMAN hath impugned us all,
"And set all sciences at naught save only Love,
"And no text he taketh to maintain his cause
"But these two,
Love God and thy neighbour.
Lord who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle, etc.
"And saith that Do-well and Do-better are two imperfect things,
"And they imperfects, with faith, find out Do-best,
"And he shall save mens souls, saith PIERS PLOWMAN."

Conscience then with Patience went, pilgrims as it were,
And Patience in his pocket took victuals pilgrim-wise,
Sobriety and simple-speech and true-belief,
To care for him and Conscience, if they came anywhere
Where are Unkindness and Covetise, two hungry countries.

As we went on talking we met a minstrel and we asked him of his craft. He was, he said, a waferer and his name Active Life. "I am hater of idleness," says he, "I am no singer or fiddler, jester or dancer. From Michaelmas to Michaelmas I sell my wafers: all London knows me.

"They grumble when my cakes come not to town,
"With baked bread from Stratford. 'Tis not long since
"When the commons were full of care and workmen were aghast,
"In the date of our drought in a dry April,
"One thousand three hundred twice thirty and ten
"My cakes were scarce when Chichester was mayor."

I looked at him. His coat was Christian, it is true; but full

of spots; a spot of pride, a spot of rough speech, of scorn, of careless bearing, boasting and bragging; he belonged to an order of hermits and he the only person in the order; he was religious without rule and blamed all men. "By Christ, Hankyn," said Conscience, "thy coat must be washed." "Ay," said he, "it has many stains."

And Hankyn asked and Patience told him of Poverty and of Riches, and of the nine blessings of Poverty; and Poverty avoideth the Seven Deadly Sins. "It is," said Patience, "a hateful blessing, it judges none (for it is too poor to be made a judge); it is wealth without calumny; it is the gift of God; it is mother of health; it is a road of peace; it is a well of wisdom; it is business without loss; and it is happiness without care."

When Hankyn heard this he wept and wailed and with that I waked.

But after my waking it was wondrous long
Ere I could know Do-well; and all my wits waned,
And some blamed my life and few allowed it,
And set me for a lazy wretch that would not reverence
Lords or ladies, or any others lives,
Or persons in fine fur with pendants of silver;
I never once said "God save you, lords,"
And never louted low and men held me a fool,
Till Reason had ruth on me and rocked me to sleep.

Then I met with Free Will and he told me of Charity, the beautiful story of Charity.

"Charity," quoth I, "Where may that be found?
"I have lived in London many long years,
"I have lived in land, my name is Long Will,
"Yet never found I Charity before or behind,
"Never saw I a man, so God help me,
"But would ask for his own, and other times covet
"Things that he needed not and take them if he could.
"Clerks tell me that Christ is in all places,
"But never saw I Him truly save in a mirror,"

**How darkly, then face to face.**

"He is proud of a penny as of a pound of gold,
"As glad of a gown made of grey russet,
"As of a Tartar tunic or of dyed scarlet;
"Glad with the glad, good to all wicked,
"Sorry when he seeth men sorry even as children are.
"When one sweareth 'tis true for truth he trusteth it,
"He weeneth no man would swear and lie
"Nor any guile or grieve his fellow.
"All sickness and sorrow he taketh as solace,
"And all manner mischief as ministry from heaven;

"Of death and of dearth adread he was never,
"Nor wept though he lost or lent to the man
"That never paid penny in the place when he borrowed."

"Hath he rents or riches or any rich friends?"

"Of rents and of riches recketh he never,
"A friend he hath that finds him and fails him never.
"Thy will be done feeds him evermore.
"He can write Paternoster and paint it with Aves,
"And often his wont is to wend in pilgrimage,
"Where lie poor men and prisoners his pardon to have.
"Tho he bear them no bread his help is sweeter,
"He loveth them and looketh how they fare.

"And when he is weary then will he often
"Labour in a laundry for half an hour,
"Run back to his youth and roundly will speak
"To his pride and its purtenance and pack it together,
"And wash it clean with his eyes warm water,
"And then singeth he at the washing and often weepeth
An humble and a contrite heart Lord thou wilt not despise.

"By Christ I would I knew him no creature sooner."

"Without help of PIERS PLOWMAN thou seest him never."

"Do not clerks know him that keep holy church?"

"Clerks have no knowledge but by works and by words
"But PIERS THE PLOWMAN perceiveth far deeper.
God seeth their thoughts.

"For there be proud-hearted men patient of tongue,
"And sweet in their bearing to lords and to burgesses,
"But to the poor they have pepper in the nose,
"And look as a lion when men blame their deeds.
"And there are beggars bidders and bedesmen,
"Looking like lambs and seeming life-holy,
"But all to have their meat with such an easy face;
"Not for penance or perfectness do they follow poverty.
"Therefore not by colour, no nor by learning,
"Nor by words nor by works shalt thou know Charity,
"But by PIERS PLOWMAN and that is CHRIST.

"I have seen him in silk I have seen him in russet,
"In grey and in fur and in gilt armour,
"And gladly he gave it to men that it needed,
"Edmund and Edward each was a king,
"Each was a saint and theirs too was Charity.
"I have seen him singing in ragged weeds,
"But in rich robes often he walketh
"With cap and oiled hair and his crown shaven,
"And cleanly clothed in black and Tartar silk.
"In a Friars frock once was he found
"In Saint Francis time —but it is long ago."

Then Free Will told me of the lives of the hermits, the lives of the Saints and of the bringing of heathen England to Christ; of the life of Mahomet and of the days of Constantine when lands and rents and lordships were first showered upon the church, and when from heaven came the angels voice condemning the gifts to the churches;

This gift to-day hath poison drunk
And those that have S. Peters power are poisoned all.

And he went on to tell of Christs miracles and how Saracens may yet be saved.

Pharisees and Saracens, Scribes and Greeks,
Are folk of one faith God the Father they honour,
And since they know the Creeds first line,
**I believe in God the Father Almighty**
Prelates of provinces should try if they would
Little by little to teach them the next,
**And in Jesus Christ His Son**
Till they could speak and spell the third,
**And in the Holy Ghost,**
And say it and set it down with
**the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.**

Then I met with PIERS PLOWMAN and he showed me the tree of Charity and the three props of it to keep it from the World, the Flesh, and the Devil: and he went on to tell me the story of the Cross.

And I awaked therewith and wiped mine eyes,
And after PIERS PLOWMAN I looked and stared,
Eastward and westward I watched well,
And went forth as a fool in the lands to espy
After PIERS PLOWMAN.

And anon I saw Abraham with Lazarus and he told me his story; and I met the Good Samaritan going to a tournament at Jerusalem and heard of his help to the man upon the Jericho Road when Hope and Faith fled away and would not help. And he talked with me; but at the last,

"I may no longer stay," said he, and pricked his grey steed
And went away like the wind.

(*Here follows the Harrowing of Hell fully transcribed.*)

## THE VISION OF THE TRIUMPH OF PIERS PLOWMAN AND OF THE HARROWING OF HELL

Woe-weary, wetshod, went I forth afterwards,
Like a reckless man that recketh not of sorrow,
Like a beggar went I, all the days of my life,
Till I waxed weary of this world and wished that I could sleep.
I rested me till Lent came, and long time I slept,
I dreamed of maidens singing "GLORY LAUD AND HONOUR"
And old folk sang Hosanna to the organs.

One like the Good Samaritan, and somewhat like PIERS PLOWMAN,
Came barefoot, bootless, without spur or spear,
Riding on an asses back, brightly he looked,
Like one that cometh to be dubbèd knight,
To get him his gilt spurs and his slashed shoes.

Faith sat in a window high, cried "Hosanna, Son of David,"
As a herald crieth when the adventurous come unto the tourney,
And Jews sang for joy.
**Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.**

Then I asked Faith what might this to-do all mean,
And who should fight the tourney in Jerusalem.
"Jesus," says he, "and he shall fetch what the Fiend claimeth
"PIERS PLOWMANS FRUIT."

"Is Piers then in this place?" said I, and Faith stared upon me:
"This Jesus of his nobility for love hath undertaken,
"Not to be known as Perfect God but in Piers Plowmans arms to joust,
"His helmet and his breast-plate —the nature of mankind.
"In Piers plate-armour this armed knight shall ride,
"No dinting blow shall harm him."

"And who shall joust with Jesus? Shall the scribes? the Jews?"

"Nay, but the Fiend, False Judgment, Death.
"Death saith he will bring down and spoil
"All that liveth and lurketh, on land or sea.
"Life saith he lieth, and hath laid his life on it,
"That for all that Death can do in three days time
"Jesus from the Fiend shall fetch PIERS PLOWMANS FRUIT,
"And put them where he will and bind King Lucifer,
"And beat and burn for ever-more all bale and death."

**Death, I will be the death of thee.**

Then came Pilate and much people and sat upon the judgment-seat,
To see how doughtily Death should do and to judge betwixt them twain.

The Jews and justices were against Jesus,
And all the court cried loud on him "Crucify."

Then stood out a robber before Pilate and said:
"This Jesus jested at our temple, he would destroy it in a day,

"And build it in three days again, here he stands that said it,
"Build it as long and large, as high and deep,
"As broad as e'er it was. We all can witness it."

"Crucify him," cries a catch-pole, "I warrant he is a witch,"
"Away, away," says another, and took keen thorns
And began to make a garland out of a green tree,
And set it sore upon his head.
"Ave, Rabbi," quoth the ribald, and shot reeds in his eyes,
And nailed him with nails all naked on the rood,
And set poison on a pole and put it to his lips
And bid him drink his death draught; "Your day is done.
"And if thou subtle be, help now thyself;
"If thou be Christ, Gods son of Heaven,
"Come adown from this rood, we will believe thee then,
"We will believe Life loveth thee and will not let thee die."

"It is finished," quoth Christ, and began to swoon,
Piteous and pale as a prisoner that dieth.

The Lord of life and light laid his eyes together.

The day for dread withdrew, and dark became the sun,
The temple-wall wagged and clave and all the world quivered,
The hard rock was riven, right dark night it seemed,
The earth shook and quaked, as though life it had,
And from their deep graves came the dead,
And told why that tempest for so long time endured.

"Life and Death in this darkness are fighting one the other,
"And none shall know in very truth who shall have the mastery,

"Till Sunday about dawn."
Some said he was Gods son
Some said, "He knoweth sorcery,
"Ere he be taken down

Two thieves suffered on the cross
Quickly came a catchpole
And their arms after
But nobody was so bold
For he was Knight and Kings son
That none should be so hardy

But then came forth a blind knight
Longeus was his name,
And before Pilate and the rest
And whether he would or no
All they that waited
To touch him or to handle him

But this blind Bachelor
The blood sprang down his spear
Then fell he on his knees
"Against my will it was," says he,
He sighed and said:
"The deed that I have done;
"My lands, my body,
"And have mercy on me, righteous Jesu,"

Then gan Faith foully
And called them cursed caitiffs:

With that they sank to earth.
that had so beautifully died;

and well is it to try
if he be dead or no."

beside him at that time,
and cracked their legs a-two,
of either of these thieves,
to touch Gods body,

—Nature would have it thus,
to lay a hand upon him.

with keen-ground spear,
his sight had he long lost,
he stood and waited,
they made him strike at Jesus.
were not bold enough
or take him down and grave him;
thrust him through the heart.

and opened the knights eyes.
and cried, "Jesu, mercy,

"I wounded thee so sore."
"Sorely it troubleth me
I put me in thy hands,
take all at thy will,

and with that he wept.

the false Jews to despise,
"This was vile villainy,

"Vengeance on you all, that made blind man beat
"One that is dead; 'tis a boys deed.
"Cursed caitiffs, it was never knighthood,
"With any bright weapon to strike a body bound;
"Yet for all his grievous wounds hath Jesus won the prize,
"For your champion chevalier, chief knight of you all,
"Yields himself vanquished in the tilt, and is at Jesus will.
"And when this darkness is past by Death will be vanquished,
"And ye lordings have lost the day for Life shall have the mastery,
"Your freedom shall be thraldom; your children shall be churls,
"Them shall ye never make lords of land to till it,
"But ye shall be barren men, ye shall live by usury,
"The life which our Lord God in all your laws forbade.
"Now are your good days done, as David told of you,
"When Christ overcame your kingdom should depart."

**When the Holy of Holies cometh your anointing shall cease.**

All for fear of this and of the false Jews
I moved me in that darkness towards Hell where He had gone.

Then saw I walking from the west a maiden looking hell-ward,
Mercy her name, mild and kind, a maiden lovely in speech,
Her sister comely and clean softly walking from the east,
Truth was her name and strong is the power that went with her.
And when these maidens met, Mercy and Truth,
Each asked the other of the great wonder,
Of the darkness and the din and of the dawning light,
And of the light and gleam which lay before Hell gate.

"I marvel at this," said Truth, "and go to know its meaning."
"Marvel not," saith Mercy, "it meaneth mirth.
"A maid named Mary, mother immaculate,
"Conceived and was with child through the Holy Ghost,
"And without childbirth taint into this world brought him,
"And since this child was born have thirty winters gone;
"He died and suffered this day about noon;
"That is the cause of this eclipse that closeth now the sunlight,
"Meaning that man shall be drawn from the murk of hell
"While this light and gleam thou seest shall blind Lucifer."

"Patriarchs and prophets have preached it oft,
"The thing that through a tree was lost shall by a tree be won,
"And that which death brought down to hell death shall relieve."

"That thou tellest," says Truth, "is but a tale of Walterot;
"For Adam, Eve and Abraham, patriarchs and prophets,
"All that lie in pain, shall yon light bring them aloft
"Or have them out of hell? Hold thy tongue, Mercy,
"It is but trifling talk; I, Truth, know it,
"The thing that once was in hell out of it cometh never,
"Job, the perfect patriarch, reproveth thy saying:
In hell is no redemption.

"Through what I have learnt," says Mercy, "I hope they shall be saved;
"Venom cureth venom, for that I have proof,
"And Adam and Eve shall have remedy.
"Of all biting venoms the vilest is the scorpions;

"No medicine may amend the place where he stingeth,
"Till he be dead and put upon the spot; and then he destroyeth
"The first poison, through power of himself,
"So shall this Death destroy, I dare lay my life,
"All that Death did first thro' the devils enticements;
"And even as thro' guile man was beguiled,
"So shall Grace that began all things make a good end,
"And beguile Guile and that is good cunning."

**Art shall deceive art.**

"Stay," said Truth, "I see, methinketh,
"From out the nipping north, not far from hence,
"Righteousness running; rest we a while,
"He knoweth more than we, of old he was before us."

"That is Truth," quoth Mercy, "and I see from the south
"Peace comes playing and in patience clothed.
"Love hath long coveted her; nay, I believe,
"He hath sent her some letter to say what this light meaneth,
"That thus hangeth over Hell, and she shall tell us all."

When Peace in patience clad approached the two,
Righteousness saluted her in her rich clothing,
And prayed Peace tell to what place she wended
In her gay garments and whom she thought to greet.

"My will is to wend," says she, "and welcome them all,
"Adam and Eve and many more in hell,
"Moses and many more shall sing the Song of Mary,
"And I shall dance and thou, sister, shalt dance to it,
"For Jesus jousted well and joy beginneth to dawn.

**At morning time there shall be joy.**

"Love, my dear one, such letters sent me,
"That my sister Mercy and I mankind should save,
"And that God hath forgiven and granted to all mankind,

"That Mercy and I shall go bail for all.
"Christ hath changed the nature of righteousness
"To fear and pity, of his pure grace."

"Lo here the patent and the token that the deed shall endure."
**In peace I shall sleep and take rest.**
"Ravest thou," saith Righteousness, "or art thou right drunk?
"Believest thou yon light may unlock hell,
"And save mans soul? Sister, believe it never.

"At the beginning God gave the doom himself
"Adam and Eve, and their issue all,
"Should die downright and dwell in pain eternal,
"If they touched the tree and of its fruit did eat,
"And Adam afterwards, against the warning,
"Ate of the fruit and, as it were, forsook
"The loyal love of our Lord and his teaching,
"And followed the teaching of the Fiend and the will of his flesh.
"Against reason I, Righteousness, remember this in truth;
"Their pain is perpetual, no prayers may them help,
"Let them chew as they chose and let us not chide,
"It is a bootless bale, the bit which they once ate."

"And I shall pray," says Peace, "their pain may have an end
"Their woe change into weal.
"Had they known no woe they had not known their weal.
"No wight knoweth weal that never suffered woe;
"No man knoweth hunger that never felt want;
"Who could by nature tell me what colour is,
"If all the world were swan-white; and if no night were
"Who could tell clearly what means the day?

" Had God never suffered at other hands than his
" Never had He clearly known if death were sour or sweet.

" So God that made all became man of a maiden,
" And suffered himself to see death-sorrow;
" Death that unknitteth every care and is the beginning of rest;
" For till famine come on us none knoweth what is enough.
" Therefore God of his goodness set the first man Adam
" In solace and in sovran mirth,
" And then suffered him to sin, to feel sorrow,
" To know what weal was.
" And afterwards adventured, and took Adams nature
" To know what Adam suffered in three sundry places,
" In heaven, in earth, and now he goeth into hell,
" To know what all woe is —God that knew all joy.
" So shall it fare with this folk; their folly and their sin
" Shall teach them what love is and endless joy;
" For no wight knoweth what war is when peace reigneth,
" Nor what is ' well ' till ' well-a-day ' teach him."

There was one there with two broad eyes,
Father Book was his name a bold man of speech;
" By Gods body," says this Book, " I will bear witness
" When this child was born there blazed a star,
" That all the wise of this world in one word agreed
" That in Bethlehem city a child was born
" To save mans soul and sin destroy.
" And all the elements bare witness unto that.
" The welkin first showed that he was God Almighty,
" Those that were in heaven took a star-comet,
" And lighted it as a torch to reverence his birth,
" That light followed the Lord to the earth below.

" The water witnessed he was God, for he walked on it.
" Peter the apostle perceived his going,
" And as he went upon the water knew him well and said,

**Lord, bid me come to Thee upon the waters.**

" Lo, how the sun gan lock her light up in herself
" When she saw him suffer death who made the sun and sea.
" Lo, the earth for sorrow that he should suffer death
" Quaked like a quick thing and cracked the rocks in pieces.
" Hell could not hold, it opened when God suffered,
" And let out Simeons sons to see him hang upon the Rood.

**He shall not see death . . .**

' Now shall Lucifer believe it tho loth he be,
' For Jesus, like a giant, cometh yonder with an engine
' To beat and break down all that be against him
' And to have out all he will.
' I, Father Book, will be burnt, if Jesus rise not unto life,
' And comfort all his kinsmen and bring them out of care,
' And disjoin and destroy the joy of all the Jews,
' And save they reverence his resurrection and honour the Rood
' And on a new law believe they shall be lost life and soul."
' Stay we," said Truth, " I hear and see a spirit
' Speaking to hell."

**Lift up your gates.**

And in the Light a voice cried loud to Lucifer;
' Ye Princes of this palace, unpin, unlock the gates;
' Here cometh unto his crown the King of all glory."

Then sighed Satan and said:
' Such a light against our will Lazarus once fetched,

" Cold care and trouble is come upon us all.
" If this king come in to us mankind he will fetch too
" And lead them all where Lazarus is and lightly will he bind me.
" Patriarchs and prophets have spoken of this thing
" That such a lord and such a light shall lead them all hence.

" Rise up, Ragamuffin, and bring us all the bars
" That Belial thy grandfather and thy dam hammered out,
" And I shall stay this lord and stop his light,
" Ere through brightness we be blinded, bar we our gates.
" Check him and chain all up, and each chink stop,
" That no light may leap in, at loover or at loophole;
" Ashtaroth, cry thou loud, and have out all our knaves,
" Colting and all his kin, and save all we own;
" Cast upon their heads who come anigh the walls
" Brimstone burning, boiling.
" Set bows with levers, and brazen guns,
" Shoot out shot enough their squadrons to blind;
" Set Mahomet at the catapults and hurl millstones on them,
" With crooks and calthrops harass them all."

" Listen," quoth Lucifer, " I know this lord well,
" Both this lord and this light long time I have known them,
" No death can harm him, nor no devils craft,
" And where he will he takes his way but beware him of the peril.
" If he rob me of my right he robbeth me by strength,
" For by right and reason the men that be in hell
" Be mine body and soul good and evil;
" For he himself hath said, who is the father of hell,
" Adam and Eve and all their sons should die and dwell with us for ever,
" If that they touched the tree or took an apple of the fruit,
" Thus this Lord of Light allowed.

"And, since he be so true a lord,
"We have been possessed of them
"Never was word against it said,
"He were a traitor to his word

I ween he will not rob us;
seven thousand winters;
and if he now began
—and he, the Witness of Truth."

"That is true," saith Satan,
"For we gat these men with guile,
"Against his love, against his leave
"Not in fiendly fashion
"And sat up in the apple-tree,

"but I sore doubt me
and we his garden entered
and went upon his land,
but in a serpents form,
and egged Eve to eat.

"And we promised her and him
"As the gods do, as God himself,
With treason and with treachery
"And made them break obedience
"Thus gat we them as ours

that after they should know
both good and ill,
we deceived them both,
through our false behest;
and brought them hither at the last;

"Yet where guile is at the root
what is gotten is ill gotten."

"And God will not be guiled,"
"We have no true title to them;
"Therefore I dread me,
"As thou didst cheat Gods image
"So hath he cheated us

says Goblin, "nor be tricked;
though our treasures they were judged,
lest Truth will fetch them.
in going like a snake,
in coming like a Man.

"Thirty winters hath he come

in a mans likeness,

"And gone about and preached," says the fiend Goblin.
"I have assailed him with sin; I have asked if he be God,
"Short answer made he me.
"And when I saw that it was so, I warned Pilates wife,
"What kind of man he was for the Jews hated him.
"I would have lengthened his life; I knew that if he died
"And his soul came hitherward he would despoil us all.
"This body, while it went alive, ever it went about
"To teach men to be true and each to love the other,
"The which life and custom he usèd long.
"He will undo us devils and bring us all down.

"And now I see his soul, sailing hitherwards,
"With glory and great light; 'tis God, I know well;
"I counsel that we flee, flee fast all of us,
"It were better not to be than abide in his sight.
"Through thy lies, O Lucifer, we first lost our joy,
"And out of heaven hither thy pride made us to fall;
"We believed in thy lies, and thus we lost our bliss,
"And now, for thy last lying, we have lost Adam,
"We have lost our lordship on water and in hell."

**How shall the prince of this world be cast forth.**

(*The writer speaks*)

As Satan rebuked Lucifer then for his lying
I believe our Lord will rebuke liars here,
And requite them the wretchedness that on earth is wrought.
Be ye ware, ye wise clerks, ye witty men of law,
Ye deceive not the simple; David witnesseth
What is the liars end;
**Thou shalt destroy all that speak lying.**
A little have I overleapt, because of lying,
And have not said what I saw and followed my story.

(*The narrative proceeds*)

When Light had unlock the gates,
"What lord art thou?" says Lucifer. And a voice said aloud,
"The Lord of Might and Main, that made all things,
"Thou duke of this dim place, anon undo thy gates,
"That Christ may enter in the Kings Son of heaven."

With that word hell brake and all Belials bars,
For aught that any wight could do, .
Wide the gates opened. or porter of the gate.
The people that sat in darkness Patriarchs and prophets
sang with S. John
**Behold, the Lamb of God.**
Lucifer could not look up, the light so blinded him,
And those whom our Lord had loved with that light departed forth;
"Lo, I am here," saith He, "life and soul both
"For all sinful souls, to save the rights of them and me;
"Mine were they; of me they came; I may the better claim them;
"Although reason may remember, and my own right too,
"That, if they ate the apple, all should die,
"I declared for them no hell for ever.
"The deadly sin they did by thy deceit was done;
"With guile thou gainedst them, against all reason,
"For in my palace Paradise, in form of an adder,
"Falsely thou fetchedst thence things that I loved.
"Thou like a lizard with a ladys face
"Trappedst them, beguiledst them, breaking my garden through,
"Against my love, against my leave;
"The old law teacheth beguilers are beguiled,

" And in their cunning fall;
" And whoso hitteth out mans eye the same pain shall he have.

**Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.**

" So life shall be lost when life hath taken life.
" Life for a life, the old Law asketh so,
" Soul for a soul, and by that Law I claim it,
" Adam and his issue at my will for evermore.

" I, that am lord of life, love is my drink,
" And, for that drink to-day, I died.
" I will drink of no ditch, of no deep knowledge,
" But from the Common Cups —all Christian souls—
" But thy drink is death, and deep hell thy bowl.
" I fought so for mans sake that yet,

**I thirst.**

" No nectar and no cyder and no costly drink
" Shall moisten me, or slake my thirst,
" Until the vintage fall in the valley of Josaphat,
" And I drink ripe wine, the resurrection of the dead.
" Then shall I as king come with angels and with crowns,
" And have out of Hell all mens souls.

" Fiends and fiendlings before me shall stand,
" And at my bidding be for bliss or pain.
" But I am merciful to men, my nature asketh it,
" For men and I be blood brethren, though not all brothers in baptism;
" All that be wholly brothers of mine in baptism and blood
" Shall not be damned to the death everlasting.

**Against thee only have I sinned.**

" It is not mens wont to hang a felon more than once;
" And if the king of the kingdom come
" When a thief should suffer death or punishment

"Law willeth that the king
give life if the felon look on him.
"I that am king of kings shall come at such a time
"Where the death-doom condemneth all the wicked,
"And if Law will I look on them it lieth in my grace,
"Whether they die or do not die did they never so ill;
"And if their sins be bold I may do mercy,
"Though Holy Writ will I be
avenged on them that did ill.

**No evil deed unpunished, etcetera.**

"They shall be cleansed clearly and washed from all their sins,
"In my prison purgatory till pardon suffer it.
"For blood may see blood a-hungered and a-cold,
"But blood may not see blood
bleed without ruth and pity.
"But my righteousness and my right shall reign in Hell,
"And mercy and mankind shall stand before me in heaven;
"I were an unkind king if I helped not my kin
"At such a time of need.

**Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord.**

"Thus, by right of Law, I lead away hence
"All that loved me and believed in my coming;
"But, for the lie, Lucifer, that thou didst lie to Eve,
"Thou shalt abide it bitterly" (quoth God), and bound him with chains.
Astrot and all others hid themselves in darkness,
They durst not look upon our
Lord the least of them all,
But let him lead forth what he
list and leave there whom he would,
And many hundred angels harped and sang;

**The flesh sinneth, the flesh redeemeth, the flesh reigneth, God of God.**

Then piped Peace a note of poetry and sang;
"After sharpest showers, most shining is the sun;

"There is no warmer weather than after watery clouds,
"Nor is love sweeter, nor are friends dearer,
"Than after war and wrack when Love and Peace have gotten the victory.

"War never was in this world, nor wicked envy,
"Which Love if he would could not to laughter bring,
"And Peace through patience all perils end."
"A truce," quoth Truth, "thou tellest truth,
"Embrace we in covenant of it; each of us kiss the other;"

"And let no people," quoth Peace, "see that we chide
"For nothing is impossible to him that is almighty."

"Thou sayest sooth," says Righteousness, and kissed Peace reverently
And Peace kissed her world without end.
**Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.**
Truth then trumpeted and sang;
**We praise Thee, O God.**
And Love luted in a loud note;
**See how good and joyful a thing it is . . .**
Till the day dawned these damsels danced,
And men rang in the resurrection morning.

With that I woke and called to Kitty my wife
And to Kalot my daughter and said:

"Arise, do reverence to Gods resurrection,
"Creep on your knees to the cross and kiss it for a jewel,
"And the most righteous relic, none richer on the earth,
"For for our redemption it bare Gods blessed body,
"And so great is its power it frighteneth every fiend,
"That where its shadow falls no grisly ghost may glide."

(*An abstract of the concluding books follows.*)

Thus I waked and wrote all I had dreamed,
And dight me ready and went me to church,
To hear the mass and be housled after.
In midst of the mass when men went to offering,
I fell soon asleep and suddenly—a dream,
That PIERS THE PLOWMAN was painted all bloody
And came in with a cross before the common people,
Like in all his limbs to our Lord Jesu,
And then I called Conscience to tell me the truth;
" Is this Jesus the Jouster that the Jews did to death,
" Or is it PIERS PLOWMAN; who painted him so red? "
And Conscience kneeled, " These be Piers arms,
" His colours, his coat-armour, but He that cometh so bloody
" It is Christ with his Cross conqueror of Christendom."

Then Conscience told me of Christs resurrection and how He gave his power to PIERS PLOWMAN, and anon departed into heaven and sent the Holy Ghost to Piers and to his fellows and gave them many gifts, the four gospels and the four fathers, Austin, Ambrose, Gregory and Jerome, and four seeds; and Piers sowed them all, cardinal virtues, Prudence and Temperance and Justice and Bravery.

Then came Pride and gathered his host together against Piers and against Grace and against Conscience and all Christians, and sent out Spill-love mounted on his horse Speak-ill-behind. And Piers and his people gathered to Fort Unity and dug a trench about it, and Conscience called Piers army to the sacrament.

" Come," cries Conscience, " Christians and dine
" Ye that laboured loyally all this Lent time
" Here is bread blessèd and Gods body there-under."

"How," quoth the common men, "and must we needs pay
"All that we owe ere we go to housling?"

"That is my counsel, each forgive other,
"Then be forgiven, and then—the altar."

"Yea, baw," cries a brewer, "I will not be ruled
"By fear, for all your jangling with your spirit of justice,
"Nor follow Conscience while I can sell
"Dregs and draff and draw it at one tap
"Thick ale and thin ale, that is my trade
"Not to toil after holiness."

"I am a curate of the church," cries a fool vicar,
"Never man told me of cardinal virtues,
"I never knew Cardinal that came not from the Pope,
"And we parsons pay for them, their furs and their palfreys,
"And the robbers that ride with them.

"Therefore," says this vicar, "by very God, I would
"No Cardinal should come among the common people,
"Let them and their holiness hold them still
"With the Jews at Avignon."
With the holy thou shalt be holy.
"Or in Rome as their rule bids to keep relics there.

"And thou Conscience, thy place is in the Kings courts

"And Grace that thou pratest of should guide all clerks

"And Piers with his new plough and eke with his old
"Should be Emperor of all the world and make it all Christian,
"Imperfect is the Pope that should all people help,

"And sendeth men to slay those he should save,
"And God bless Piers Plowman who tilleth for all,
"As well for wastrels and wenches in the brothel
"As for his servants and himself though he serves himself first,
"And travaileth and tilleth as hard for a traitor
"As for a true tidy man all times alike.
"As for the commons they heed but little
"The counsel of Conscience and his cardinal virtues."

Then out laughed a lord, "By this light," says he,
"I hold it right and reason to take of my steward
"All that my auditors or else my agents
"Counsel me by their books and by my clerks accounts
"With the spirit of understanding they made the account roll,
"With the spirit of bravery willy nilly I take it."

Then there came a king and, "By my crown," he said,
"I am king the commons to rule,
"And holy church and learning from the cursed to defend,
"And if me lacketh aught Law wills that I take it
"Where soonest I find it. I am above the Law.
"And what I take of you I take it at the teaching
"Of the spirit of justice, for I judge you all,
"I may be safely housled for I never borrow."

"In condition," quoth Conscience "that thou canst defend
"And rule thy realm in reason right well and in truth
"Then shalt thou have thine asking."
All is thine to defend, but not thine to rob.
The vicars home was far off and he bowed and took leave
And I awaked and wrote my dream.

Then for the last time I went upon my way and I met Need. He reviled me for meekly listening when the lord and the king

had spoken so boldly. "Couldst thou not excuse thyself?" says he. "The king steals, the lord steals; and thy need, thy necessity may well steal too. Need hath no Law."

He sinneth not that winneth his food thus,
And if he seeth a cloth and can make no better bargain
Need anon taketh it and keepeth it for surety.
And if he list to drink the law of nature would
He should drink at *any* ditch ere he for thirst died;
So Need at greed need may take as for his own
Without counsel of Conscience or any cardinal virtues
Save the spirit of temperance.
Wise men forsook wealth for they would be needy,
And dwelt in deserts and would not be rich,
And God all his great joy spiritually left
And came and took mankind in him and became needy;
Both fox and fowl may flee to holes and creep,
Fishes have fins to fleet therewith to rest,
Need hath taken hold on me and I must needs stay
And suffer sorrows sour.
Be not abashed to beg and to be needy,
Since He that wrought all the world was willingly needy,
Never a one so needy nor none died so poor.

## THE VISION OF ANTICHRIST

When Need left me anon I fell asleep
And dreamed marvellously that in mans form
Antichrist came, and all the crop of truth
Turned upside down and overset the root
And made the false spring and spread increasing mens needs.
In every country where he came he cut truth away,
And made guile grow there as though he were God.

Friars followed that fiend for he gave them copes,
Convents reverenced him and rang their bells,
And all the house came forth to welcome the tyrant
To welcome his, to welcome him,
And they would rather die than live save fools alone,
since loyalty was blamed.

Antichrist had thus soon hundreds at his banner,
Pride bare it boldly and a lecherous lord.

"I counsel you," says Conscience, "come with me, ye fools,
"Into the Fort of Unity and hold we us there,
"Cry we to Nature to come and defend us
"From the hurts of the fiend for love of PIERS PLOWMAN.

"Cry we to all the commons to come into Unity
"And there abide and fight gainst Belials children."

Nature heard Conscience and from the planets came,
And sent forth his foragers, fevers and fluxes,
Coughs and heart-catches cramps and toothaches,
Rheums and red eyes and running scabs,
Boils and botches and burning ague,
Frenzies and foul ills the foragers of Nature,
Pricked and preyed on peoples heads
That a legion lost their lives.
"Harrow and help," they cried, "here cometh Nature
"With dreadful Death to undo us all."
The lecherous lord then cried aloud
To a knight called Comfort to bear his banner.
"To arms," cried Comfort, "each keep his own life."
Then met the battle ere minstrels could pipe
Or heralds of arms had named the knights.

Old Age hoary went in the vanward,
Bare the banner before Death, by right he claimed it;

Nature came after
Pocks and pestilence,
Death drove down after him
Kings and Knights,
Learned and foolish,
Whom he hit straight
Many a lovely lady,
Swooned and died

with many keen sores,
and slew much people;
and pashed all to dust,
Kaisers and Popes,
let no man stand,
never stirred after;
many a knights leman
for sorrow of Deaths dints.

Conscience of his courtesy
To cease and suffer them
Leave Pride privily
And Nature ceased

Nature besought
and see if they would
and be perfect Christian;
to see the people mend.

Fortune gan flatter
Long life he promised them
Among all manner men
And gathered a great host
Lechery did his will
With privy speech
Armed him in idleness
A bow he bare in hand
Feathered with fair promise
And his untidy tales
Conscience and his company

the few that lived,
and sent out Lechery
unwedded and wedded,
all against Conscience.
with a laughing face,
and painted word,
and in high looks,
and many broad arrows,
and many a false truth,
troubled full oft
of holy church the teachers.

Then came Covetise
Overcome Conscience
Armed him in avarice
His weapons all wiles
And with glosing and with gabbing
Simony sent him
To hold with Antichrist
And bid them come
Made Good Faith flee
And boldly brought down

casting how he might
and the cardinal virtues,
and lived hungerly,
to win and to hide,

he guiled the people.
to preach to the prelates
and save their stipends
to Court to Conscience
and Falsehood stay,
with many a bright bribe

The wit and wisdom of Westminster Hall;
Rode at a judge and tilted at his ear
And overset his truth with "Take-this-and-help-us;"
Then to the Court of Arches and turned Law to Simony,
And with a miniver mantle bribed its officers,
Matrimony went his way ere death departed them
And devised divorce.

"A," cried Conscience, "would Covetise were Christian,

"So keen a fighter so bold and biding."

Then laughed Life and slashed his clothes,
And armed him in haste in ribald words,
Held Holiness for a jest and Kindness for a spendthrift,

And Loyalty a churl and Liar a gentleman,
Conscience and Counsel he counted it folly.

Thus Life boasted when things seemed better,
And pricked forth with Pride and praised no virtue,
Cared not how many Nature slew who at the last shall come
And kill all earthly creatures save Conscience alone.

Life leapt aside and caught a leman to him,
"Health and I," cried he, "and an high heart
"Shall keep thee from dread of Death or Eld,
"We will forget sorrow and care naught for sin."

This pleased Life and Fortune his leman,
And they gloried and begat a gaddling at last,
One that wrought much woe, —Sloth was his name—
And Sloth waxed wondrously and soon was of age,
And wedded Wanhope a wench from a brothel;
Her sire was a juryman that never swore true,
One Tommy Two-tongues tainted in every court,

Then Sloth spied war and made a sling ready
And threw dread of despair twelve mile around him,
And Conscience cried on Eld
Bad him fight for the right and frighten Despair.

Then Eld took heart and was hastily shriven
And waved away Wanhope and fought with Life,
And Life fled away to Physic for help,
Besought him succour and used his salves,
Gave gold, good measure that gladdened his heart
The doctors gave him a glass house to live in.
Life believed that leechcraft should stay the steps of Eld
And with drinks and drugs drive away Death.

Sloth with his sling an hard assault he made,
Proud priests came with him more than a thousand,
With cloaks and pointed shoes and long blades dangling;
They came on Conscience, they fought for Covetise,
"By Mary," quoth a cursed priest (was of the Irish border),
"I count Conscience not a whit if so be I get silver,
"No not so much as a draught of good ale."

So said sixty of the same country,
And shot their shots against us, many a sheaf of oaths,
Broad-hooked arrows "By-Gods-heart, by-Gods-nails,"
And almost brought down Holiness and Unity.

Then came the Friars to help Conscience; but they knew not how to fight. Yet Need pleaded for them and at last Conscience smiled and took them in to the Castle of Unity.

"Keep you in Unity, and envy none,
"Learned or simple but live by your rule
"I will be your surety for your bread and for your clothes
"If ye leave Logic and learn instead to Love."

Conscience held him in holy church Unity,
And made Peace porter to pin the gates;
All tale tellers and idle titterers,
Hypocrisy and envy an hard assault made;
Conscience called a leech that well could shrive,
Salve those that sick be and by sin wounded;
Shrift shaped sharp salve and made men do penance,
" Pay that thou owest."

Some liked not this leech and sent up letters
" Was any surgeon in the fort with softer plasters? "
Love-to-live-in-Lechery lay there and groaned,
He had fasted on a Friday and fared as he would die,
" One Friar Flattery," says he, " is surgeon and physician."

" We have no need," says Conscience,
" Parson or parish priest, " I wot no better leech penitencer or bishop,
" Than one PIERS PLOWMAN that ruleth them all.
" Yet will I suffer since ye desire it
" Friar Flattery be fetched to physic all you sick."

Friar Flattery heard of it, hied him fast
To a lord for a letter to have leave to cure
As though he were curate, and came with his letters
Boldly to the bishop and gat his brief;
Came there where Conscience was and knocked at the gate,
Peace unpinned it, porter of Fort Unity,
And in haste asked him what was his wish.

" Ifaith," quoth this Friar, " I would talk with Contrition
" For his profit and health, for this I came hither."

" He is sick," quoth Peace, " and many another,
" Hypocrisy hath hurt them, hardly will they recover."

"But I am surgeon, Conscience knoweth me."
"I pray thee then," saith Peace, "ere thou pass in,
"Who art thou then? Hide not thy name."
"Certes," says he, "I am, Sir Enter-houses."
"Yea, go thy gate," says Peace, "thou comest not herein,
"I knew one like thee eight winter gone,
"Came in a cope at a court where I dwelt,
"Was my lords leech and leech to my lady,
"This preacher salved the women, when the lord was away,
"Till some were with child."

But Kind-speech bid Peace open the gates,
"Let in the Friar; he may here see
"Life by his teaching leave all Covetise
"And dread Death and withdraw from Pride
"And be at one with Conscience."

"Thou art welcome," quoth Conscience, "canst heal the sick?
"Here is Contrition my cousin, wounded,
"Comfort him and care for his sores
"The parsons plaster biteth him deep,
"He left it on him overlong, from one Lent to another."

"I shall amend it," said the Preacher,
And goes and grips Contrition and gave him a plaster
Made of a private payment; and to one he says,
"I shall pray for you and for all your friends,"
To another, "I shall make you Sister of an Order,
"At mass and mattins, my lady, for a little silver."

Thus he goeth and gathered gold, and flattereth when he shriveth,

Till Contrition clean forgot to cry and weep,
And lie awake for his wicked deeds as once he was wont,
And Contrition left contrition that is the sovran salve,
And took his comfort from the Friar.

Conscience cried aloud and bad Learning help him
And called upon Contrition to help and keep the gate;
Saith Peace, "He lieth and dreameth and so doth many another,
"The Friar with his physic this folk hath enchanted,
"And plastered them so pleasantly they dread no sin."

"By Christ," quoth Conscience, "I will become a pilgrim
"And walk as wide as the world lasteth
"To seek—PIERS PLOWMAN."

(Here endeth PIERS PLOWMAN.)

# COMMENT

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Comfort the poor, protect and shelter the weak, and with all thy might right that which is wrong. Then shall the Lord love thee and God Himself shall be thy great reward.—*Attributed to King Alfred.*

EVERY literature has its dreamers. It is so simple to sit down, fall asleep, and then assail your enemies and support yourself by dreaming your opinions. If any objection be taken, well, it was a dream. Plato dreamed his beautiful myths; the wonderful relation of Er at the close of the Republic was but the dream of one who had been dead; the moody tinker of Bedford dreamed the *Pilgrims Progress;* Roman literature has its *Somnium Scipionis;* Chaucer dreamed Scipios dream again in the *Parlement of Foules;* Dantes vision was but a vision when sleep came on him in the wood; the whole of the *Faerie Queene* may be said to be a dream. The dream is as common to poet and prose writer as is the invisible cap or the impossible task to the folk and fairy lorist.

It must be admitted at the outset that some dreams—whatever the machinery may be for their production—are artistic, finished, jointed, logical. We recall them in the morning; beyond their incongruity, their horror or their fun, we can find no fault with them. Indeed we are amazed at their cleverness. All is in order; every incident proceeds from what has gone before; they are admirably prepared; and good dreamers will certainly support and believe R. L. Stevensons statement that the dreaming brain can make excellent plots. The well-known essay on Dreams gives, apparently in good faith, an illustration of this, and Stevensons dream-plot, if unmarketable, is, at least, most striking.

But other dreams, literary or no, are as confused as the welter of waves on a rocky shore. You make out the general movement, but no more. New waves are continually breaking from all sides; and it is to this order of dream that the vision of Piers Plowman belongs. As I said in the Preface, the general scheme is clear; but the detailed pictures are inconsistent, detached, and in some instances apparently useless for the main purpose.

The writer is always falling asleep; half-way through the book he is dead and buried; the vision finishes and begins again; the end is no end; the Plowman himself is an elusive dream-figure with many shades of meaning in him; apparently, though it was twice revised, the work had no final revision. It is of a piece with its chaotic century. We should not be surprised to find that the book was based on a dream.

But the confusion of the dream is nothing to the confusion of the allegory. Even the sexes of the various figures seem indeterminate; and Wit, Wisdom, Clergy, Scripture, Imagination, the Active Man, Peace, Mercy, Reason, Righteousness, Repentance, must not be driven hard towards consistency. It will be well for the reader, if he wishes to get a clear picture of the dream, not to insist upon its details. That such a clear picture may be obtained I hope I have shown in my Preface; but few allegories may be pushed roughly to their conclusions. Even Professor Saintsbury, that eulogist of the *Faerie Queene*, is constrained to admit that you may if you like leave the allegory alone; it "won't hurt you."

The book definitely promises a picture of England between 1350 and 1400. The dates of course are not given, but these are supplied by the evidence of its contents. We are to see the Field full of Folk. We are not going to look on any Dutch interiors, or mere portraiture of a few saints and a few sinners; there are to be no "nine and twenty in a company of sundry folk by aventure ifalle;" something wider, bigger is promised us, nothing short of a birds-eye view of the English world with London for its centre, while the dreamers body lies on the Malvern Hills, and over him sing the birds of early summer, and the brook runs babbling by and mingles its sound with the noise of a great multitude. You shall see the Pope, titular head of Christendom, finding it hard as the King does to guide men as he would; cardinals against whose election you and I may not speak, for we are no Lollards, not we; bishops running freely through all sorts of offices and doing all kinds of work as William of Wykehâm and Bishop Spencer of Norwich did; unable, for all their cleverness, to rule their dioceses and to keep the robber pardoner and the meddling friar away; priests, deacons and subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, readers and doorkeepers, all the seven "minor orders" of the Church; you shall see abbots, men of business, Priors, men of management, and all the people under their rule; monks and professed brethren, clerks and

novices; you shall see the hard-working parish priest, passably ignorant, miserably poor and made poorer by his mortal enemy the friar; the friars, all the four orders, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and Austins, pledged to poverty and pursuing wealth; the chantry priest and the gild priest each bent on making an income and filling a soft place; and with them the good and bad accompaniments of a great Church, hermits, anchorites, pilgrims and palmers. But there are more to be seen than these; and in the great plain are officials of every kind, sheriffs and bedels, assizers and jurymen, whose business it seems to be to prey upon humanity. Turn your eyes in another direction and Edward III. is slowly dying (alas for the Black Prince who might have done so much—he is gone) and Lady Meed is stripping off his ring; the kitten Richard II., so helpless at first, so foolish afterwards, is in the hands of Parliament or nobles; the nobles are quarrelling, the Commons are curbing them; disorder, disorganisation and attempted reform can all be seen from Malvern Hills. As for the lawyers, you shall see enough of them, all dressed in furs, all pleading for pence, all open to bribery, and juries and witnesses, judges and pleaders are on the look-out for florins. Then the merchants pass by and the moneylenders, the big and little traders, till we come to the very dregs and find ourselves face to face with the Seven Deadly Sins of London. London itself and its narrow ways, its bridges, its palaces, its convents, its hovels, its brothels, you shall see them all and almost catch the conversations as the people pass by us. You can be present at the great Stourbridge fair and there see Venetian glass, Bruges linen, Spanish iron, Norwegian tar, Hanse fur, Cornish tin and Cretan wine, all for sale in the half of a square mile which was occupied for three whole weeks. Then you shall come forth into the country and watch the misery of the country poor, hear of their work, their food, their dress; and so along the roads past the crowds of beggars and wastrels, till perhaps you shall get a dinner in some great mans house and take part, from a side-bench, in a discussion of some useless point of theology. Nothing shall escape you by the way, the burial-places of the Great Pestilence, the stocks, the pillory, the cucking-stool, the alehouse, the hospital, the prison, the recluse in his cell, the doctor murdering his patients, the minstrel telling his love stories, the juggler and the monkey-man, the farmer and his stots, the poor priest preaching, the lunatic loller prophesying, and the train of Lady Meed. Nay, you may, if

you be fortunate, see Piers himself, sowing his seed and preaching to the pilgrims of Truth, and may dream of him, as Jesus, leaving the world with Piers Plowmans fruit—poor humanity—in his arms, the only Saviour of the world. This world-wide "landscape with figures" is the promise of William Langland—a promise more than fulfilled, for not half the scenes have been enumerated, not a quarter of the characters named. Could any one to-day, in Langlands social position, dream, promise and perform so great an undertaking as this?

We take the story from the writers standpoint. It is not, as some histories tell us, that the kings wars were unimportant; but they were to the writer and to the people whom he represents the least important of his visions. No one in editing a peoples book to-day should begin with discussing the European position, or the change of an Indian capital; but the price of sugar, the picture palace, the emptiness of churches, the six-penny doctor, the schools, the football field, the public-house and the district nurse would attract the Langland of to-day first. By the Langland of to-day I mean Mr. Masterman, Miss Loane, Mr. Lyons, Mr. Pett Ridge, Mr. H. G. Wells, Mr. Harold Begbie and Mr. Stephen Reynolds. I begin then with the book picture of the writer himself, always premising that in this work the writer set himself an enormous task, that his view may be one-sided and extreme, and that, even in his self-revelations, we may be on ground as treacherous as when we try to recover Charles Lamb from the hints of Elia.

"Long Will," as he calls himself, in one memorable line, was set to school in early days and learned to love the school and cloister; for one who afterwards was so severe a critic of this world, he speaks kindly of these early days. It may have been at Malvern; and he may have gained then his vague and rather intellectual love of the country and its sights. But in this he never approached Chaucer, who is filled through and through with the outdoor Englishmans appreciation of field and forest and stream; for Langland was as much a town man as Dr. Johnson.

His learning is remarkable. The Bible is, if roughly quoted, at his fingers ends; but he never uses the Wycliffite version, though it must have been accessible in some form before the last recension of the manuscript. In this however he is not singular; for Wyclif never quotes from what is called his own translation. The usual reading of the Fathers supplies Langland

with a few texts and a few illustrations; Gregory, Jerome, Austin and of course Cato are among the writers he has heard most of; indeed to the medievalist Cato may be regarded as a Church Father. The apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus may have helped him in that tremendous section of his poem in which Piers Plowmans fruit, *i.e.* humanity, is brought from Hell; but it is unsafe to dogmatise, for so much was known by being heard and repeated orally that before Caxtons time a man might possess a very liberal education and yet have never seen a book at all; so much did the writer of that day rely upon his memory. A few French sentences prove little; Chaucer himself, who must have spoken French well, avoids French speech more than Shakespeare does; and there is no hint of Langlands knowing any Greek. It is interesting to think he may have read Chaucers Prologue; let us hope, for the sake of his own peace of mind, that he did not; for he would, I fear, have reckoned Chaucer among the minstrels.

He must have drifted to London for he knows it well: he certainly represents himself as preferring the easy life of a chantry priest to that of a hard-working man. Cornhill and S. Pauls are the most respectable parts of London mentioned by him; but the poorer or disreputable parts mentioned, such as Cocks Lane, Shoreditch, with their stews and their quacks, are many, and their characters are drawn to the life. He says he was married and had a daughter; but he is careful to give wife and daughter equivocal names, which he need not have done. He convicts himself of lax practice in regard to honesty in work. He is extremely careful to point out that whatever may be thought of his opinions in the poem, he is not a loller; indeed, he made verses on the lollers when he lived in Cornhill. He was always poor, always welcome, always critical; but in London his opinions developed and he became one with the mass which new ideas were slowly moving. He found himself the apostle of the poor, the honest quiet poor, whom he came to love passionately. Their poverty, grinding and unceasing, he ascribed to want of philanthropy, robbery, jobbery and bad government. He never ascribed it to simony at Avignon—the sinful city—nor to the French wars, as he might have done had he been writing to-day of his own work; nor, of course, did he understand that there may be a dozen causes for misery, some of the causes being directly attributable to the miserable themselves. He is not in the least ashamed of begging for the poor

or for himself; and indeed the magnificent philanthropy of the medieval Church in its best days had encouraged begging, and perhaps produced the poverty it strove to alleviate. In all centuries (at any rate in England) the condition of the poor has been watched over and alleviated by the rich and the moderately rich in a way that shows, gainsay it who may, that the teaching of Christ in regard to individual responsibility has up to now permeated the country; and though poverty may have overtaken benevolence, and though benevolence itself may be a mistake and philanthropy a crime, no friend of the poor would care to imagine an England denuded instantly of all that has been given and is being freely and gladly given to the poor from definitely religious and Christian sources. This is more true even of pre-Reformation than of post-Reformation England, for in Langlands day the state assumed no responsibility. It must be remembered that he wrote a quarter of a century after the Black Death and England had not in any sense recovered; and it must be further remembered that in his day the alleged enmities of class and class, sex and sex, capital and labour, had not been felt. The rich and the poor, notwithstanding the Peasants Revolt, were nearer one another than they are to-day. The enmities in Langlands day were those of king and nobles, nobles and the middle class; neither the king nor the rich merchant was in theory or practice unfriendly to the people.

Yet, whether he understood the problems or no, his book is more valuable than any contemporary writing: for he wrote from the inside. He tells us what the poor wanted; and only lately, notwithstanding the fact that his book and his teaching have been accessible for five hundred years, has this lesson been learnt. It is a new discovery to us, that the poor have opinions regarding their betterment. It comes almost as a shock to us to read in his pages that his poor required lower rents, better and less adulterated food, warm clothes, and above all the kindly sympathy of people who lived among them and tried to understand them. We can almost hear him saying to us: "Give us these first, and then, if you like, you can go on to model villages and sterilised milk." I respectfully wonder if Mr. Stephen Reynolds and Miss M. Loane, who write with knowledge of our poor, have carefully looked through Piers Plowman; if they have they must have been startled.

Besides loving the poor and hating the wastrel, Langland loved

the Church and hated its household enemies. It is true that (considering his century) a minimum of dogma satisfied him: but with this he combined a maximum of Christ. The Pope, as such, is a legitimate ruler; he seems to know nothing of the rottenness of Rome and Avignon; even the Church machinery was good; but it was worked ill. We who live in a time when the clergy (I use the word of the ministers of all denominations) work hard, are not over-dressed, do not carry forbidden revolvers, do not rob the poor, do not pay money out of the country, do not plead in papal courts, are not absentees or pluralists, and certainly are not rich, can hardly understand that a man of Langlands sympathies should have been, as he certainly was, so strong a defender of the fourteenth-century Church. In it he sees the only bulwark against Antichrist; and he cannot even see this bulwark raised unless the friars and monks and parish priests and bishops come with Piers Plowman into the Castle of Unity.

And if he loves the Church, he is at least respectful to the king. Beyond a sharp word now and again to Edward III. and a remonstrance to Richard II., Langland is a kings man; it seems to me that he even has some insight into the difficulties of both sovereigns when he writes that pathetic line:

"But it is hard," quoth the king, "to guide my people to honesty."

Even the great and rich he does not attack indiscriminately; and he certainly believed in those class distinctions which every society and every section of society makes, though it hides them as decently as it can and professes to abhor them.

But lawyers, theologians, most minstrels, physicians and unemployables he cannot away with; and here we see for the first time the narrowness of one who did not understand law or theology, and who could not fiddle or cure the sick. For there must have been, and indeed he allows it, many lawyers who were not bribable, many theologians who knew what they were talking about, some decent-mouthed minstrels and a few satisfactory doctors; but his lines about the unemployable might have been written in 1916.

Here then is the man; a reformer of Church and State and a defender of the poor; failing perhaps from the very immensity of his canvas to paint all his pictures equally well, yet contriving even in his bitterest moments to follow his own advice to the king, "Hear the other side." Again and again he pleads against

his own writing, and you may seek in vain through all the book for one word of self-praise.

His humour is not Chaucers; his coarse passages may be numbered on the fingers of one hand, and they are then very brief and blunt; while Chaucer, like Shakespeare and all the Elizabethans, is crammed with passages which Langland would never have tolerated. He is too much in earnest to waste his time in loose talk; though, if he had wished to do so, the sardonic writer of the Seven Deadly Sins could have put to shame Skelton, Dryden and Wycherley in their own peculiar mistles. Fun there is, satire there is, in abundance; but there is no filth, nor, alas, except in one passage, are there any tears. He is dry-eyed, staring at Antichrist. England is hurrying to the precipice and Piers Plowman is gone.

His choice of metre, if metre it can be called, was no doubt intentional; he meant to get to the ears of the people and this he could only do by alliteration or by ballad. The Chaucerian line would have stamped him as a dilettante in social reform. The result is that the book is not a poem; no juggling will reduce it to rules; no whitewashing will make it all interesting; but it stands crammed with living pictures and full of a terrible anger. Whether he did gain the peoples ear is very doubtful; the one quotation in the trumpet-calls of the 1381 revolt is not at all conclusive; apart from ballad, song and folk-tale, literature has never been thoroughly assimilated by the English people; the people have no time to read. The Bible alone and a certain amount of economic prophecy have sunk deep.

I cannot understand why his book has never been seized on by artists and illustrators; and I venture to call the readers attention particularly to the following descriptions which are full of the power of a poet who carelessly let the poetry go—the ride to Westminster, the Vision of the Sins, the description of Piers service to Truth, the description of the cottager, the character of Charity, and the descent into Hell.

This then was the man and this the book which set out to describe fourteenth-century England: for whom was the book intended and why was it written? what were the real pictures as we have them from other sources? is Piers Plowmans indictment true?

Langland was born into a world the great fact of which was the Church. It was everywhere. It possessed nearly, not

quite, all the learning of his day; it filled offices which have long since been handed to the laity. Its courts controlled Church affairs and a good deal more than Church affairs—personal morality (save the mark) came largely under its lash and its fine. It was wealthy, national, proud at heart; as the Good Parliament showed, it hated Roman aggression; but it was waiting for a chance of burning heretics—which soon came. Its buildings filled the streets of London and Oxford; the parish church, the cathedral church, the friars convent, the monks abbey, the chantry, the anchorites cell, the *mesondieux*, and even the schools, all were—the Church. It was as impossible for a reformer to write a poem and not to fill it with the Church as it would seem absurd for a modern reformer to regard the Church as the centre of all. It is the custom to deride the fourteenth-century Church. Langland and Wyclif, so different in other matters, denounce the wholesale simony, the traffic in pardons, the whole institution of the friars, the power of foreign priests, the misused wealth of the Church and the misspent time of her sons; and Chaucer, who could not rise to these heights of indignation, never loses a chance of satire. Even the modern Catholic historian Lingard cannot point to the fourteenth century with satisfaction; and the French Jusserand admits fully the charges of the poets. It is well therefore to realise that if there is no other side to the question, in two respects at least the Church of the fourteenth century has had scanty justice done to it. And first of all, it was not blind to its own defects. The abuses noted in Chaucer and Langland are condemned strongly in a papal letter of the time. In 1340 the Bishop of Durham, in 1378 the Archbishop of Canterbury, pleaded for reform. "Nothing can give a better idea of the wickedness of Pardoners than the actual letters of Popes and Bishops" (Jusserand). Again, the Church was democratic in this, that by it and by it alone the poor mans son saw and took his chance. A long list of archbishops and bishops might easily be written out, all of whom came from the homes of the poor. It was no uncommon thing for a promising serf to receive freedom and to be trained in the service of Church and State; and it is precisely this carelessness as regards the birth, or even the legitimacy, of its clergy that draws down Langlands strong criticism: for Langland, apostle of the poor, believed in gentle birth. The knightly Chaucer, who had been about the world and fought, thinks nothing of the fact that his parson, the

gentlest, sweetest saint in all his writings, was own brother to a ploughman who had "ilad of donge ful many a fother," but Langland wishes that the Church would keep the poor in their places. The following paragraph quoted freely is worth consideration: "The most striking feature of the centuries to the sixteenth is the way in which the Church opened up a career to all ranks and classes of the people. There was of course always a strong aristocratical element among the clergy . . . the middle classes supplied a great number of parish chaplains, assistant curates, chantry priests, gild priests; young men born and bred as serfs were not infrequently educated and ordained. Among archbishops only, Richard came from humble parents; E. Rich was son of a merchant, R. Kilwardby was a Dominican friar; W. Reynolds was son of a baker; Chichele was a shepherd boy picked up and educated by William of Wykeham; Cranmers people were small squires; R. Flambard, the great justiciar of Henry I., was the son of a poor Norman priest; Richard of Wych, the saintly bishop of Winchester, was son of a decayed farmer at Droitwich, and for several years worked as a labourer; the famous Grosseteste was of a poor family at Stradbrooke in Suffolk" (Cutts, *Parish Priests*, 133). Sir Robert Sale, who died so heroically in 1381, fighting against the insurgents, was himself a serf who had risen to knighthood, and was captain-general of Norwich. Only through the theory and practice of the medieval Church did poor mens sons become lawyers, architects, sheriffs, scribes, physicians and teachers.

Chaucer understands the theory of the Church Catholic, a theory which has never changed, that all men before it are equal. In this Eastern and Western religions are alike. The practice of the Church has indeed varied; but the curious anomaly may be noted that the world has invariably taken a view which is at variance with that of the Church. The worlds practice is to treat men as equal, as far as it can, and not to hurt their feelings; that they are equal in any sense it never will believe.

In another matter the medieval Church demands the respect of its modern critic. It aided education; indeed, it was the only educator, and, directly by its teaching, indirectly by its encouragement of benevolence, it founded places of education which flourished till the Reformation. Writers as diverse as Mr. A. F. Leach, Mr. Bass Mullinger, Professor Thorold Rogers, relying on statutes, sermons, charters, and quoting freely from

contemporary authors, come to the same conclusion: the pre-Reformation Church was the friend, not the enemy, of education of the poor; for the rich man either derided education or had his own peculiar way of obtaining it. If Church advice had been followed, "the battle of and for modern education, especially primary education, would have been infinitely easier to fight." Richard II. rejected a proposal to forbid villeins to send their children to school to learn clergée (knowledge): "Every man or woman, of what state or condition he be, shall be free to set their son or daughter to take learning at any school that pleaseth them within the realm."

The Church then, full of mistakes, crammed with internecine and often unpatriotic quarrels, but still in theory, and to a great extent in practice, the poor mans Church, filled the picture. Its spiritual pretensions were high—its ecclesiastical pretensions were enormous—but its social pretensions were not those of some of the later centuries. The world will always yield (or has till now always yielded) to spiritual pretensions when adequately supported by the consistent life. It clings even now to the legend of S. Francis, whose spiritual pretensions, under the guise of humility, were an unconscious travesty of those of his Master; even ecclesiastical pretensions it will listen to, though with a smile, when based on what it loves—sympathy, charity, humanity; but the social pretension which grew from wealth and from an ill-defined class feeling, it cannot reconcile with the teaching of the poor parson of the *Canterbury Tales*. Classes there must always be; man is not happy without them, and they exist in every station of society; but society knows at heart that they should be decently covered, and the truest mark of a "gentleman" is to hide his "gentlemanliness." Castes there must always be; Piers Plowman himself belonged to the very highest, whether we look at him in his mittens or as riding to the gates of Hell; and of all the characters in the poem his spiritual pretensions are the greatest. Yet, by virtue of his freedom from social pretensions, he is intensely democratic.

The Church of any country, any century, can hope to recover lost ground among what are called the masses, not by a whittling down of dogma, nor by a renunciation of claims to denounce the sins of society—for the human society is the Church—but by a frank abjuration of all social and economic pretensions. The history of the friars, as well as that of the Salvation Army, point alike to the right road and to the parting of the ways.

...ish church was the special property of the people who ...found it. When small, it still had some gild window, some ...g-remembered connection with the great or small village names. It rose, as it often rises to-day, the only building of the human souls ambition, above the meaner roofs; it was the centre of village life and the meeting-place of the dead. When large, it served for examination room, playhouse, even dancing floor; it was open every day and all day; it had its daily services. It was the rallying-point of the English villages. Parsons might be and were absentees; it might be served by the unworthy; but it and its services were there. Langland points clearly to abuses. Once a fortnight perhaps some interfering friar of one of the four orders (Cain they were pleasantly nicknamed by Wyclif) would come preaching in the churchyard; and sometimes the pardoner or limiter would invade even the church itself, when the priest was not strong enough to prevent it. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that a most worldly acquisitiveness was the secret of the friars activity and of the parsons hatred of them; they laid their hands on shrift money and on the widows mite, and they persuaded the richer people to ask for and to pay for letters of fraternity. The beautiful description of a friars church in Piers Plowmans Creed might without change of a word be written of any well-preserved Gothic church; it must be remembered that all this wealth of stone and carving and gold was then new, burnished, shining, not toned down to melancholy beauty by the lapse of centuries.

Friar and parson were, it is probable, unlearned; the parsons charged the friars with interference, the friars charged the parsons with ignorance and neglect of their parishes. The terrible picture of Parson Sloth in Langland must of course apply only to a few, but comic instances of parsonic ignorance are many. "Robert de Umfraville, clerk, was instituted in 1317 by Bishop Stapledon to the rectory of Lapford, but the bishop required he should go to grammar school and should come to the bishop once a year, that the bishop might know what progress he was mâking. The young man sent in his resignation in 1320." Against such a picture may always be quoted the poor parson of the Prologue. The friar, however, was the better speaker, for it was his *métier* to speak; and the occasional visitor gets more credit than the preacher to whom the parish is accustomed. The friar was ready, polite, pleasant, popular; and his ways with women were so successful as to become proverbial.

Nothing in Langland said against the friars comes near the bitter satire of Chaucers laugh; and the praise of the friar by the wife of Bath would have shamed any one but a friar.

If the parson objected to the friar he must in many cases have objected to the chantry priest also. Rarely could a man, a paid cleric, go on singing masses every day without interfering with the parish. It was a lucrative and easy life. Sometimes the church itself was turned into a chantry, sometimes the chantry priest kept a little school. In S. Pauls alone there were 70 chantries and 111 obits (for occasional masses), and in 1378 the weak Archbishop Sudbury, who was murdered by the 1381 mob, speaks of the lives of these mass-singers as tending to the detestable scandal of churchmen (Besant, 2, 134). It could not have been satisfactory for the parson, learned or unlearned, good or bad, to have so many inspectors and critics of his work about him. He lived in a limelight which darkens shadows, and strange to say, he has had no apologist but Chaucer the courtly poet. Pity the poor parson in any century who does his multifarious work unnoticed by superiors and sometimes unthanked by his people.

The parson, the friar, the seller of pardons, as well as the higher ecclesiastics, and of course all monks, were vowed to celibacy, but it does not seem that celibacy meant chastity, or that it prevented, in the case of parsons, the irregular marriages which the Church frowned on even to the days of Queen Elizabeth. "The secular cleric," says Cutts, "was not bound to be celibate. But if his marriage came up before the ecclesiastical courts it was then voidable. Consequently, to make his marriage incapable of legal proof, he had it performed irregularly in some particular. Then it was illegal, derogatory, but not immoral or disreputable." In this the Church theory conquered till the Reformation. As Matthew Paris said long before, "the Pope deprived the clergy of sons and the devil sent them *nephews*." Langland, however, admits the chastity of many churchmen, and when Langland speaks well of even part of a class we must be careful of condemning it.

In any comment on Langland the monks, nuns and their convents may be almost disregarded. There were no doubt many who came out of the cloister and who rode to hounds; many nuns who deserved the terrible picture drawn by Wrath (p. 78); but they receive less castigation at the hands of the poets than does the rest of the ecclesiastical machinery. Indeed, the

monks seem to be outside the machinery; and the fierce envy of conventual wealth, which was one of the main causes of the Reformation, had not yet made itself greatly felt. As for the reformers of the day, they plainly derided the monks and passed them by.

But the picture of Church matters is by no means even outlined in as yet. There remains to be considered the rabble of hangers-on, and under this uncomplimentary term may be included foreign agents, pardoners, pilgrims, palmers, hermits, ancres, recluses of all kinds, and those officials who got their living out of Church moneys, fines, or offerings. They indeed form a motley crowd. Chaucers picture of some (*e.g.* the Pardoner and Summoner) is very clear; we see the papal agent, approved or connived at by the English bishop, selling and showing his absurd relics to the gaping crowd; the summoner ready to pounce on any defenceless person and bring him or her before an ecclesiastical court. For the summoner there may be some defence. For the pardoner it seems there is none. M. Jusserand, who would defend him if he could, admits that Chaucers picture is true; it is more damaging to admit that the truly Catholic Langland is more contemptuous even than Chaucer. But nothing disturbs the pardoner; for insolence of hypocrisy which recognises itself there is nothing to beat his Prologue and his beautiful tale; only the scathing Billingsgate of the Host brings a flush of anger to his cheek. It is true that to-day the pardoner has vanished from the streets of England; but his audiences have not vanished; and the crowds that buy nostrums from the magazine advertisements and bottles at street corners, and the stealthier and richer clients of the crystal-gazer, cannot afford even to laugh at fourteenth-century England. The pardoner has turned quack and gipsy: that is all.

The foreigner met with less approval than the pardoner. In 1353 and 1393 Englishmen were forbidden to appeal to the papal courts; Langland sees them appealing against the king. In 1351 foreigners were forbidden to hold English livings. Both these statutes aimed at extinguishing what were felt to be un-English proceedings.

But the pilgrim and the recluse were nearer to the people than the summoner, the pardoner, or the foreigner. On every road the pilgrim, with his liquified saints blood, his vernicle picture, and his scallop-shell, told of his escapes, his travels and his relics. He was a genuine person—when he had travelled; he

had been, as the wife of Bath had, over many a strange stream, and if he liked had leave to lie all his life after. Langlands and Chaucers pictures are so familiar that we may illustrate from one of their contemporaries, Sir John Mandeville, a clergyman, who, writing his book in Latin, French and English, distinctly states that he had been a great traveller. The cross and reed and sponge he saw at Constantinople; he fought against Arabs for the Sultan of Babylon; he vouches for Ethiopians with one large foot and one only, used as an umbrella; for miraculous draughts of fishes, which came to the shore to be caught out of pure reverence for the king of the country, who has a very large family; men without heads, men with eyes in their shoulders, dwerghes (dwarfs) with no mouths, but only a lytylle round hole, men with horses feet, all the marvels of the medieval map-makers are vouched for by Sir John. On his return he showed his book to the Pope, who had his statements of things seen and heard, examined, and " my book was proved for true." In the *Roman du Renart* the fox starts on pilgrimage with staff and scrip and takes sheep and donkey (Bernart the arch-priest) with him. Long before Erasmus, with his bitter satire, the people had begun to laugh at the pilgrim; he knew too much, he had been too far. But pilgrimages are by no means things of the past, nor can they be lightly laughed at. " They were dangerous, meritorious, and they showed a way to heaven. They relieved a man of work, they showed him amusing people. He and his licence were free of the roads " (Besant). With staff (bourdon) and scrip (a small bag), with bottle, rosary, shells and flasks, or other adornments, he proved his story; if he came from Palestine he wore strips of coloured cloth, sewn cross-wise on the shoulder, and the palm was sewn to clothes or carried in the hand. Vernicles (the picture of Christ), crosskeys and effigies of S. Peter and S. Paul were worn by Roman pilgrims; but alas, the Rome or Compostella pilgrim had not always been there. " W. Blakeney, shetil-maker, who pretended to be a hermit, was brought into the Guildhall for that whereas he was able to work for his food and raiment, he went about barefoot and with long hair under the guise of sanctity, and pretending to be a hermit, saying he was such and that he had made pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome, Venice and the city of Seville in Spain, and had received many good things from divers persons . . . he acknowledged that for the last six years he had lived by such fetches and deceits, and that he never was in the parts

aforesaid" (Riley, 1412). At home, besides the great S. Thomas and the many roods, S. Cuthbert at Durham, S. William of York, little S. William of Norwich, S. Wulfstan of Worcester, and S. Swithin of Winchester were among saints to whom pilgrimages were frequently made (Cutts). The reader must be reminded that there is no adequate ground for questioning the occasional "miracles" which occurred and still occur in such pilgrimages. One of the most brilliant modern productions of a cultivated mind and of a religious life, I refer to the Saintes Évangiles of M. Lasserre, owes its origin directly to a miraculous cure wrought at Lourdes. Scientists may explain, Protestants may question; but neither pilgrimages nor "miracles" are dead—yet.

The recluse—the true, strict recluse—has nothing to recommend him or her. The ghastly silence, the dirty walled-up cell, the long lone cold hours, form a picture compared with which the strictest life of Carmelite or Brigittine was comfort itself. It is suggested that the slits called lepers windows were for the use of anchorites, who had their cells outside the church walls. It is true that the recluse could in some cases talk to the outside world, and was sometimes so much consulted by the women of the place that he became a nuisance; it is equally true that some recluses did enjoy comparative comfort, though they were tied to one cell; but the true ancre was one of those who, like monk of the desert or trappist of to-day, is isolated, silent, dead. The service read over him and the subsequent condition of his days may be read and understood by the reader of Besants *London*.

Hermits were the good-tempered Timons of the day; they lived in houses, they helped travellers, they were not always poor. There is no need to waste pity on the hermit; he came from all ranks of society, as his modern counterpart does. It is not every man who is smitten with the love of the society of his own kind; and there are to-day hermits even in cities, as there were in Langlands time.

But all of whom I have been speaking were officially connected with the Church. There remains another class of friars who roamed the country before Langland had ceased writing, and who carried no licence from pope, bishop or archdeacon. I refer to Wyclifs poor priests. It is doubtful whether Langland means us to take any notice of them; whatever may have been his attitude to Wyclif, he either does not know the name of

Lollard, or he intends to sever himself entirely from lollers or Lollards. There is no question connected with the 1381 revolt which is so obscure as this: did Wyclif through his poor priests preach a social as well as an ecclesiastical revolution? When we find historians such as Mr. Thorold Rogers and Mr. Trevelyan disagreeing *toto cælo* on this point, it is well for the ordinary reader to suspend judgment. It may be enough for us to note that there seems to be no proof that Langlands book or any part of it was used to inflame the social unrest, and another interpretation may be put upon the often quoted passages in the message from the Great Society.

A much more profitable inquiry turns us away from pope and cardinal, friar and monk, hermit and pilgrim, Wyclif and Swynderby, to the central figure which, as I have said before, glances in and out of the work in such elusive and mysterious fashion. It is long before we meet Piers Plowman, but when we do meet him he never wholly leaves the stage; if not actually speaking, his presence is felt: it is the book of Piers Plowman. So strongly does the reader feel this that it has been suggested that we have here but a fragment of genuine alliterative folk-literature of which Piers Plowman is the hero. The Plowman leads the way to Truth, whose servant he is, and the cutpurse and the pardoner desert him; a stray common woman is left, and he and she begin, but others join in the great pilgrimage. Before it is begun the half-acre has to be ploughed, and knight and wastrel have to help. Ladies must help too; the work of all is for the weal of all, and Piers makes his last will and testament. Then the unemployables wrangle and Piers calls Hunger and Famine to help him; the gentry cannot. The pardon is sent by the Almighty to poor Piers Plowman, and henceforth he is a symbol which leads men to Do-well, Do-better and Do-best. He is referred to as the great example, the great teacher, until again he appears upon the scene riding to Jerusalem as the Good Samaritan to joust with death for the deliverance of humanity from hell. As Prince he sails hell-wards and the victory is assured. But Piers as Christ is gone, and Antichrist takes his place; the Piers that follows is the spirit of Church unity; the mysterious plowman, saviour, man, Christ, is now again lost, and must be sought for in a new Grail quest over the wide world. Small wonder that readers are in doubt as to Langlands meaning. I take it that Langland wilfully confused the character, for in his own mind there was no separation

between the God-in-man and the man-in-God. As Bishop Stubbs says, "The full likeness to Jesus Christ, the ideal Son of God, is stored up in the Plowman, in the common man of the street and of the mill and of the workshop." Above every class and caste, sympathising with all, thinking nothing too high, nothing too low for him to notice, Piers represents the best religious thought of which Langland was capable, mans likeness to Christ and even his identification with him being made possible by the very nature of Christs appearance in the world. Love could not bear to remain in heaven; it must take mankind on it or die.

Allegory pressed hard loses its charm. If Piers Plowman were as clear outlined as Christian, the mystery of the Plowman would not fit in as it does with the chaos of the scene. He seems to suit the kaleidoscope of the field full of folk which is now a city, now a plain, now a procession, now a church, now a court, now a desolate land along which trains of pilgrims go—and always a dream. Battles and law courts vanish, Cornhill and Jerusalem disappear, and the sleeper is left upon the misty hills. From the Malvern Hills the mist never wholly goes; only now and then stands out, as in the Arthurian vision, the great figure—crowned.

Yet, though the writer leaves his work in despondency and gloom, something had been accomplished. To have seen Piers Plowman working in that whirl and worry of politics was something: to have realised that figure made life worth living to the writer, though death should be but, as he called it, the unknitter of all care and the beginning of rest.

This is the reward of the spiritual reformer, whether he be a Francis, a Shelley or a Langland: that he catches glimpses of the impossible. The light that never will be on land or sea is his inspiration, and far above any amelioration of social ethics is the spiritual sense of the son of man ploughing the fourteenth-century fields, pushing the pilgrims through the strait gate and riding through Cheapside or Jerusalem to get him his gilt spurs and his slashed shoon. Langland, the poor wandering mass-priest, saw over old S. Pauls the vision splendid, as a later singer, poorer than Langland, in the same London, almost in the same street, saw it and could write:

> "O world invisible, we view thee;
> O world intangible, we touch thee;
> O world unknowable, we know thee;
> Inapprehensible, we clutch thee.

The angels keep their ancient places,
Turn but a stone and start a wing;
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry; and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacobs ladder,
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my Daughter,
Cry—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Gennesareth but Thames!"

If we leave the religious outlook and look upon the social side of England, we are struck by the constant repetition of the note of misery. Yet it does not appear that the century was as bad as its successor. The drain of the French wars must have been felt; yet the Great Pestilence had, in its awful way, lessened by fifty per cent. the number of mouths that had to be fed.

But Langlands complaint is not merely that the poor want food and raiment; it would appear from him that they needed protection against themselves and against the great. The adulteration of food and drink, the want of the poor mans lawyer, the general corruption and deceit all round him, the extremes of luxury and penury—these are the things that wring his heart. By way of illustration the following may be quoted from Riley as instances of dishonesty in trade; the first instance being one of the eternal quack, without whom no century can live.

In 1382, "Roger Clerk was attached to make answer to Roger atte Hacche that whereas no physician or surgeon should intermeddle with medicines but those who are experienced, the said Roger Clerk, who knew nothing of the arts aforesaid nor understood anything of letters, came to the house of him Roger atte Hacche and there saw one Johanna, the wife of the said Roger, who was then lying ill, and gave the said Roger to understand that he was experienced and skilled in the art of medicine.

"Whereupon the said Roger gave him 12 pence in part payment of a larger sum that he was to pay him in case the said Johanna should be healed. And upon this the same Roger Clerk gave the said Roger an old parchment cut or scratched

across, being the leaf of a certain book, and rolled it up in a piece of cloth of gold, and this he put about her neck, but in no way did it profit her.

"And the said Roger Clerk was asked what the worth of such a parchment was, whereupon he said that upon it was written a good charm for fevers. Upon being asked by the court what were the words of this charm, he said, 'Anima Christi sanctifica me, corpus Christi salva me, sanguis Christi inebria me,' and the parchment being then examined, not one of these words was found written thereon. And he was told by the court that a straw beneath his foot would be of as much avail for fevers as this said charm of his was, whereupon he fully granted that it would be so. And because that the said Roger was in no way a literate man, and seeing that he was found to be an infidel and altogether ignorant of the art of physic, it was adjudged that the same Roger Clerk should be led through the middle of the city with trumpets and pipes, he riding upon an horse without a saddle, the said parchment and a whetstone for his lies being hung about his neck, an urinal also being hung before him and another urinal on his back" (Riley, 465).

The following are referred to:

"... making pots of bad metal that come to nothing and melt; mixing any manner of wares whereof the good thing may be impaired by the old; the dubbing or moistening of any merchandise, by reason whereof the weight may be increased; selling putrid beef; making of hats, shoes or brides of poor or forbidden material ... stealing dough by making holes in the tables used for baking; using false nets in the Thames; selling ale out of tankards with thickened bottoms.

"Godfrey le Rede was attached with his bread, and this bread was weighed and adjudicated upon before Stephen de Alyndone, mayor, and it was found that the penny loaf of light bread of the said Godfrey weighed 15*s.*, and was wanting of its right weight to the amount of 8.2½, and upon this he said he did not make the loaf aforesaid nor had any share therein for gain or for love, and he put himself upon the country as to the same. And the country (jury) came by John de Kyngyestone, pelterer, and others in the panel. Who being sworn said upon their oath that George the aforesaid is partner with John de Jernemue and Robert de Donstaple, bakers, who keep a bakehouse without

Newgate just opposite Cokkes-lane, and that he shares with them in the said bakehouse and is their oven-man. Therefore it was adjudged that he should have the punishment of the hurdle" (Riley, 119).

"John Rightwys and John Penrose, taverners, being accused of selling red wine unsound and unwholesome, John Rightwys was acquitted and John Penrose shall drink a draught of the same wine and the remainder shall be poured on his head" (Riley, 1364).

"Robin Porter, servant of John Gibbe, baker of Stratford, when the bread inspection came, knowing that the bread of his master was not of full weight, took a penny loaf and in it falsely and fraudulently inserted a piece of iron weighing about 4 oz. with intent to make the said loaf weigh more in deceit of the people" (Riley, 1387).

As a lover of the poor Langland hated adulteration; but it is difficult to understand why he shared so clearly with the 1381 rebellion its hatred of lawyers. We can see why the Rev. John Ball and his well-to-do friends burnt manor-rolls and charters and hunted lawyers to death. A lawyer to them meant a man who carried out or brought into operation the hated statutes which for forty years tried to fix wages after the Black Death. But Langland, as Jusserand says, cursed the revolt, and explicitly states that he did not sympathise with the cry for high wages. I think the explanation lies in Langlands belief that no juryman or siser, no panel, no inquest or collection of witnesses and neighbours collected to weigh the truth was ever honest. They were all got at by Meed. And the poor man, being poor and unversed in the ways of bribery, could get no lawyer to help him. There was no man to set the poor right in the usage of the law courts, civil and ecclesiastical. Justice should have been freely administered, not bought and sold, nor even paid for. Langlands Utopia is still Utopia, for even to-day the friendly lawyer will counsel his friend to keep clear of the honest but distrusted courts—distrusted because of long bills and unsatisfactory conclusions. The poor mans doctor is with us, a real blessing; but the poor mans lawyer has not yet made his appearance in the land.

Of corruption Langland cannot say enough. Meed is over all; Simony, the worst bane of the medieval Church (as a Catholic

writer puts it), was only one of the hydras heads. The most shameless bribery went on in high places, and no more disgraceful instance can be given than that of Richard Lyon, a condemned minister of the Crown, who actually sent a barrel of gold to the dying Prince, in order to win his help. To insult the Black Prince thus at any time of his life would have been bad enough, but so to deride and flatter the purest friend of the commons when he lay helpless and in grievous pain seems one of the most shameless acts in history.

Beyond the corruption and the inability to get justice done for the poor man, Langland turned his careful and observant eye on luxury, especially on luxury in dress. Chaucer is at one with him, and though he laughs at the excess of dress in his poems, in his prose he very nearly calls it one of the eight deadly sins. It would seem as if modern luxury in dress were really less than that of the fourteenth century, and the wife of Baths matinée hat was as broad as is a targe, surely an acreage to which we have not yet attained. The regulations of the time are very particular in their condemnation of the use of various furs by the common lewd women who dwell in the city of London, forbidding them to wear any manner of noble budge; but Pernel Proudheart was by no means the only offender; in 1363 sumptuary laws had been passed regulating the dress of England. Even the clergy dressed in all colours and carried short swords, and it is said did not always take the trouble to put on a black gown at a funeral.

As for arms and armour, Langland seems to hate them far more than the luxurious dress. He was no soldier like Chaucer, and took no delight in enumerating the pieces of armour worn by the knight. To him armour meant weapons and weapons meant wounds, and war was as barbarous as it had seemed to the old Hebrew prophet. Chivalry and its accompanying virtues meant less than nothing and vanity to the chantry priest; and very greatly would he have disapproved of Robert Newby, rector of Whitchurch, who leaves his brother his best sword; of the vicar of Gaynford, who leaves his best suit of armour and all of his arrows; still more would he have admonished John Wyndhill, rector of Arnecliffe, who in 1431 leaves a copy of *Piers Plowman* and green sanguine and murrey gowns and a baselard (knife) with ivory and silver handle.

He dislikes the feasting and the minstrels as much as the weapons; they are Judas children, tellers of loose stories, and

he would have answered to any one of them who said he had a licence as the indignant sixteenth-century writer answered, "Have you a licence from Christ Jesus?"

These fighters and minstrels and wastrels moved him to fierce indignation. But his heaviest wrath is reserved for the discontented workman, and for the man who will not work. Though he hated lawyers who tried to get the Statute of Labourers enforced, he had no sympathy at all with the men who wished to force wages higher. It is amusing to see how many statutes and regulations were passed against the able-bodied beggars. No person, according to statute, was allowed to relieve them, and in 1359 occurs the following entry:

"Forasmuch as many men and women and others of divers counties who might work to the help of the common people have betaken themselves out of their own country to the City of London, and do go about begging there so as to have their own ease and repose, not wishing to labour or work for their sustenance, to the great damage of such the common people, and also do waste divers alms which would otherwise be given to many poor folk such as lepers, blind, halt and persons oppressed with old age and divers other maladies, we do therefore command that all those who go about begging and who are able to work shall quit the said city between now and Monday next" (Riley).

"John Warde of York and R. Lynham of Somerset were questioned for that whereas they were stout enough to work for their food and raiment and had their tongues to talk with, they did pretend they were mutes, they went about carrying a two-ell measure and an iron hook and pincers and a piece of leather in shape like a part of a tongue edged with silver and with writing around it: 'This is the tongue of R. Warde:' with which instruments they gave persons to understand they were traders and that they had been plundered and robbed of their goods, they making an horrible noise like unto a roaring and opening their mouths, to the manifest deceit of the whole of the people" (Riley, 1380).

An extract from the *Standard* of October 6, 1911, is interesting by way of comment:

"William Thomas, a blind maker, of East Surrey Road, was charged with begging from foot passengers at Rosebery Avenue,

Clerkenwell. A constable said he heard Thomas say to a gentleman: 'Give a penny to a poor old cripple.'

"Thomas was bound and bandaged on his first appearance in court, splinters and slings being used for his arms and legs. He now came up on remand without any of these professional impedimenta. The officer said that there was only an old wrist strain. He was sentenced to three months' hard labour."

And in the daily press of October 11, 1911, I find a magistrate recommending an iron muzzle for quarrelsome women. In Langlands time branks (leathern gags) were used. As for the inefficiency of work of which Langland so bitterly complains, the reader may be referred to *The Common Growth* of Miss M. Loane, written last year:

"In another small town where lads professed that work of any kind was extremely hard to get, I found an old established tradesman, a leading councillor and a J.P., taking down the shutters and sweeping out the shop. . . . I had the loafing son of a widow in my mind. The worthy justice also knew the widows son and many others. Clinging to his broom he hastily assured me that the loss of time was nothing compared with what he had wasted in trying to make boys do the work."

And Langlands beggars, who will have hot meat quite hot, and that of the best, find their modern counterparts:

"As to bacon, I can't get them (cottagers) to try good Danish at 8½*d.*, though ordinary English is up to 11*d.* just now, and the best is at a fancy price. And none but the best English cheese will do for them, however small a bit their money will run to."—*The Common Growth* (Miss M. Loane), 1911.

Truly the fourteenth century does not seem to be so very far away.

The tragic events in the period of history over which Langland cast his eye were the Black Death of 1349, the death of the Black Prince in 1376, and the Peasants Revolt of 1381. The Black Death, by emptying the land of labour, was the cause of the famous statute by which for forty years an attempt was made to regulate and keep down the wages of the free-contracting labourer. The consequent discontent, rendered greater by the continuation of the French wars, swelled into the Peasants

Revolt; but that revolt would in all probability never have occurred had the Black Prince, who was on the side of the disaffected, lived to make headway against the nobles. Parliament, though ready to fight for the people, could do little; the deeds of the Good Parliament of 1376 were writ in water; "all its acts were cancelled, and the statute-book bears no trace of the greatest assembly of the period." The day of reckoning came. Opinions are freely divided on the subject of the revolt. We seem to know everything about it except the answer to this question, "Who was at the back of it?" Some say the well-to-do middle class in the country; some hint that the youthful king used the revolt, if he did not actually suggest it, as a weapon against the great nobles. Some again say, while others deny, that Wyclifs poor priests engineered what was known as the Great Society. We may be certain of this, that Langland strongly disapproved of it, although, as Professor Thorold Rogers thinks, the revolt may have put back the Reformation for a century and a half. The revolt failed, and Langland, seeing only its turbulence and murders, was content that it should fail; he had no hopes for his day from any social change; the horizon was that of "the collied night;" he was a social reformer from one standpoint only—the standpoint of religion. Without this, according to him, all social reform is meaningless, and must lead to greater luxury and greater discontent. None but Piers Plowman can save the people that he loved.

For above all writers he is the peoples friend. None is more intolerant of their sad condition, none is more outspoken than he to king, bishop, knight, friar and huckster. The poor he has always in his heart. We do well to put up statues to Howard and to Quintin Hogg, and Guy dreams in stone among the people whom he helped; but as yet no statue stands in Cornhill, no glass blazes in the Abbey in memory of this champion of the poor. Perhaps it is better so, considering his indignant condemnation of the stained window and the church advertisement. Like Thomas à Kempis, he would prefer to be unknown and thought nothing of; and his work is, by wicked irony, interesting only to the student of history and the examinee. The book, however, demands—and never more loudly than now—that it should be read again and again by any who care to see the bitterness and the hope, the despair and the exultation of him who wrote four centuries ago the Vision of the Peoples Christ.

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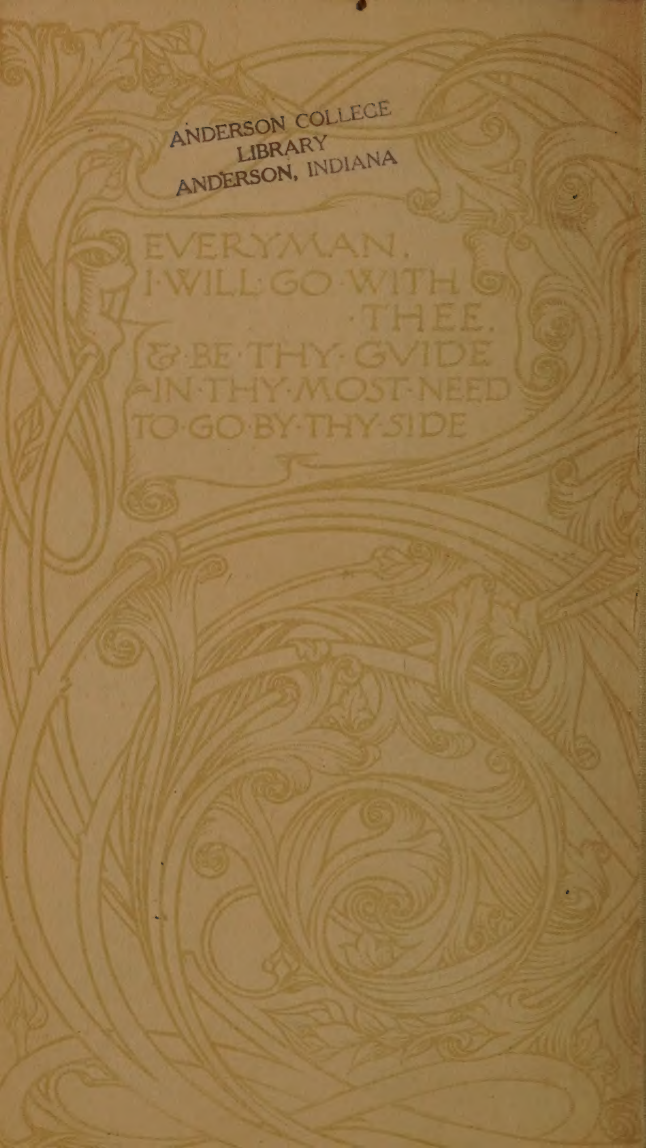

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